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PARISH CHURCHES *of* ENGLAND

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BOSTON NEW YORK

PARISH CHURCHES OF ENGLAND

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PARISH CHURCHES OF ENGLAND

Illustrated from a selection of photographs specially taken by Thomas W. Sears for Harvard University. Introductory text by C. Howard Walker

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CONTENTS

PARISH CHURCHES OF ENGLAND

By C. Howard Walker

THE CHARM OF THE ENGLISH PARISH churches is due essentially to the variety and multiplicity of their forms, to an eclectic use of materials, and a more or less happy association of variations of a style of architecture frankly expressive of the different periods of the various portions of the buildings, but always possessing the common factors of pitched roofs, buttresses, arched and traceried openings, and towers with or without spires. Each and all of these factors are unnecessary from either a traditional or a utilitarian point of view in every other type of modern building, and therefore it must either dominate its surroundings, as do the great cathedrals, or be isolated in a considerable domain as are cemetery chapels, or be amongst small, low and comparatively isolated buildings such as occur in small towns and villages. The English parish church was, as its name implies, the centre of religious activity in the parishes far enough removed from the great cathedrals and abbeys to require local places of worship, and their type is admirably adapted for similar locations today. But there are other elements which are peculiar to these churches. They are the direct product of the localities in which they occur, built of the material at hand, whether it be brick or rubble or flint or stone, put together by the local mason to the extent of his skill; which skill differed greatly in various places and at various times; and added to at will. Thus, in one building many materials and styles of work appear, frankly added or interpolated as occasion required, with a direct simplicity of treatment, without attempt at disguise, which lends a special charm to the result.

They are never formal, or mannered, but are spontaneous and courageous in expression. Cell is added to cell, openings are made in walls, buttresses are supplemented or removed to suit the immediate requirements. They have grown and developed as healthy organisms, not as affectations. There is scarcely one of them that does not show the activity and increase of religious functions from the time of the Normans until the devastating touch of Henry VIII

checked their growth. Norman, Transitional, Early English, Decorated, Perpendicular,—each and all of these styles have left their traces upon them, so intimately intermingled that the local verger today gives bewildering and not always enlightening information to the tourist, and the vicars and curates wrangle over the exact date of a capital or of a moulding as evidenced by the stone cutting or its position in the wall.

It is interesting to follow the testimony of the buildings themselves, regardless of the intricate fabric of history and tradition woven about them by the local chroniclers. The battle of Hastings was in 1066. Before this time whatever chapels were built by the Saxons are of a crude description,—mere cells with pitched roofs, walls of rubble, flint and brick indiscriminately used, but the square Saxon tower was existent, as was also the round tower of the Celt. With the coming of the monks to Durham, with the founding of Norman abbeys, the small churches in the outskirts of the See began to multiply and in certain factors to imitate neighboring cathedrals.

The square apse, the tower at the crossing of the transept and nave and great length in comparison to width are characteristic of English cathedrals. The small churches also show imitative qualities. Saxon square towers were at times incorporated into the building, in fact made the nucleus of it, as occurs in some of the churches near Hitchin Herts.

The Norman round arched style, imported into England by the monks, lasted approximately until 1140, from which time to 1200 the pointed arch is being substituted for the round arch, the openings appear more and more in groups, and the so-called Transitional style occurs. The century between 1200 and 1300 is usually classified as that of the Early English style, while the succeeding 14th century work is called the Decorated, and that from 1400 to 1550, the Perpendicular style. Naturally the styles fuse. It is difficult to determine at times whether work is Transitional or Early English, but the Decorated style is quite well defined by the character of the traceries in the windows, and the Perpendicular by the fact that the shape of its decorative subdivisions are long vertical rectangles. Obviously there are other indications, especially in plans and in mouldings and in carving.

It will be noticed that the Sussex towers are in most cases Norman, which is natural, as Sussex was one of shires first dominated by the Normans. In Northamptonshire the towers terminated in broached spires which in most cases are of the Transitional period, or of the early part of the Early English period. These are direct

importations from Normandy, in several cases being built upon octagonal drums which are placed between the square tower and the spire. The spires were originally all broached spires, i.e.—built directly on the walls below, without intervening parapets. Later Decorated parapets have been built at the base of a number of these spires. Of the examples given, one only, that of Barnack Church, Northamptonshire, has an untouched Norman tower and spire. Most of the spires illustrated are in Northamptonshire, which shire was not controlled fully by Norman ecclesiastics until considerably later than was Sussex.

Square towers without spires are built in the Decorated period usually with corner buttresses and with parapets. Two examples are given,—Badgeworth Church, Gloucestershire, and Brampton Church, Northamptonshire.

A marked peculiarity of English parish church plans is that of the roofing of naves and aisles. In many cases the original church had a nave only and aisles were added, on one side of the nave or on both, with independent pitched roofs, so that the east elevation of the church appears with two or three gables often of different sizes, heights and pitches. The result is picturesque and charming, but absolutely impracticable in a region of snow, which would pack between the roofs.

Up to the 14th century, the tradition of the narrow window openings, which occurred in ecclesiastical buildings before the development of the leaded glass which shut out draughts at the same time it permitted the entrance of light, was maintained in the English work. The possibility of the almost absolute elimination of the wall between piers was not appreciated by the English, who were persistent in their retention of narrow openings. The utmost they did until the 14th century was to group these openings in long lancet windows. The glass with which they filled the openings was therefore kept light and did not develop the rich color of the French glass, such as that at Chartres. The English cathedrals and churches had no light to lose, and also the skies were grayer than those farther south. As a natural result English glass was silvery and white in character, as is apparent in the Five Sisters at York, but as the practicability of glazed openings seeped into the English mind, a demand arose for more light in the churches, which demand was at once satisfied by the increased size of the windows in the Decorated style and by the introduction of delicate mullions and tracery. These windows are at once inserted in the parish churches replacing the smaller earlier openings. They occur first at the west ends, to light the naves, over

the entrance door, which is usually small for a small congregation, and in the illustrations there is scarcely one in which the Decorated and Perpendicular windows do not appear. The Chancels have their windows changed less frequently, but the aisle walls are perforated with them. This absolute frankness and catholicity of expression is manifest everywhere. It is this that gives the English church much of its charm, all the forms and types used are structurally suited to the materials used, and have been studied for their proportions as well as for their purposes, and have the intrinsic quality of good taste.

A survey of these views of English parish churches convinces one of their sincerity, of their flexibility of treatment, and their catholicity of spirit, all of which qualities are exactly those which are needed in the small churches of today.

In Kent and in Essex, where stone quarries are infrequent, the local stone is made into rubble in the walls, unostentatiously, not flaunting its poor quality by exaggeration, as is the case in the majority of American cobble-faced walls, but brought to a surface by the mortar in its joints so that there is apparent more mortar than stone. If there came a lack of stone, brick was substituted, or so intermixed with the stone that it made an interesting texture. If a nave had become too small, a transept or an aisle was added in the style of the time. If the church were too dark new light openings were made, or old ones enlarged. The whole building has an intimate affectionate quality,—it is human in its whims and fancies; it is versatile in its expression. But a structure of this kind must at first have been firm boned and well developed to be able to submit to such vicissitude without actual and visual ruin,—and firm boned, strong walled, simple these English churches are. In using them as an inspiration, it is their spirit which is of value, the suggestions of expression of their uses which are stimulating. The conditions under which they have been built are in many respects not unlike those of today. A demand for a house of worship in a small community which shall express the tradition of the religion, the capabilities of the local people to appreciate and to create not only a work of utility but a work of art, the will to perform with what is at hand and according to their means, and the desire to do all this in the best way it can be done. Here are points in common between the past and the present. In meeting them the English parishes erected a number of buildings which for individual character and charm have not been excelled and which can well be used as a standard for our endeavors.

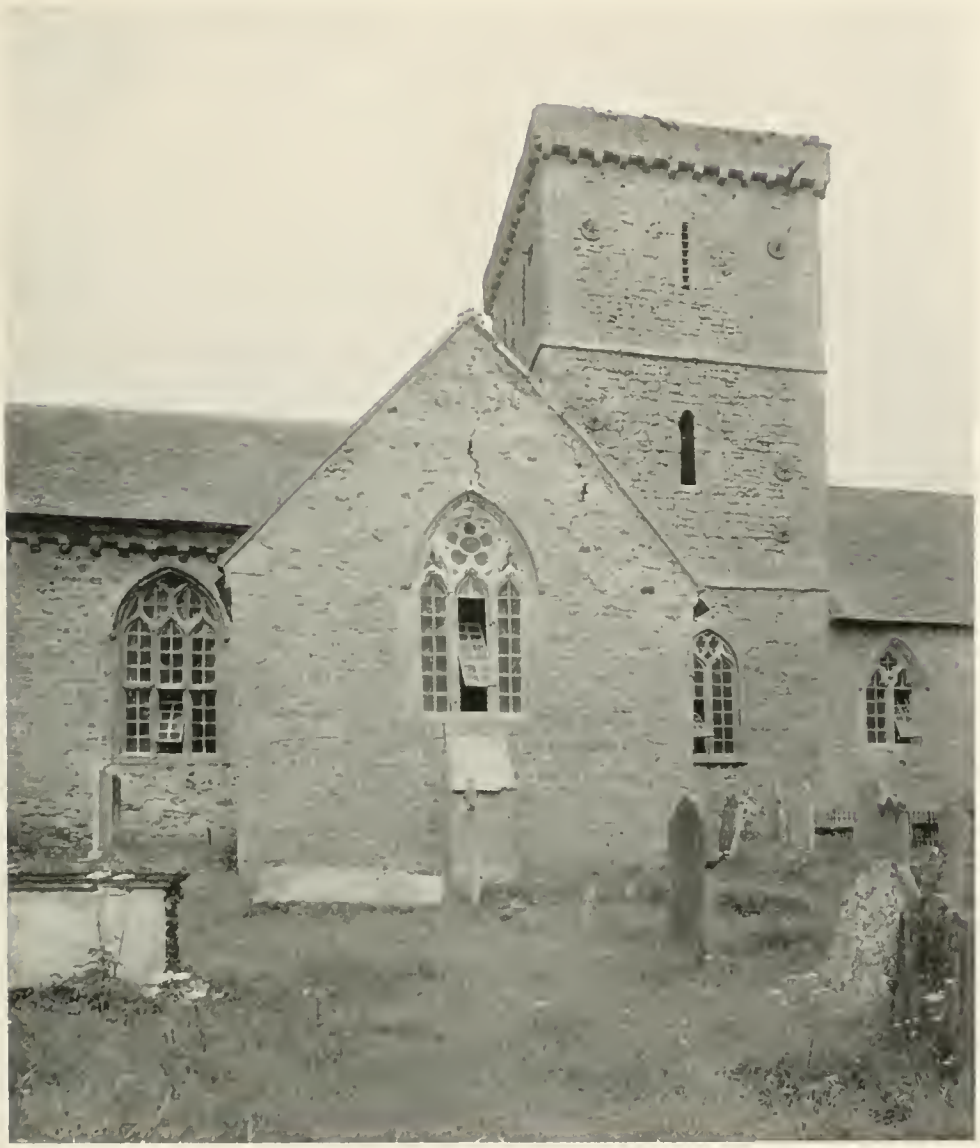
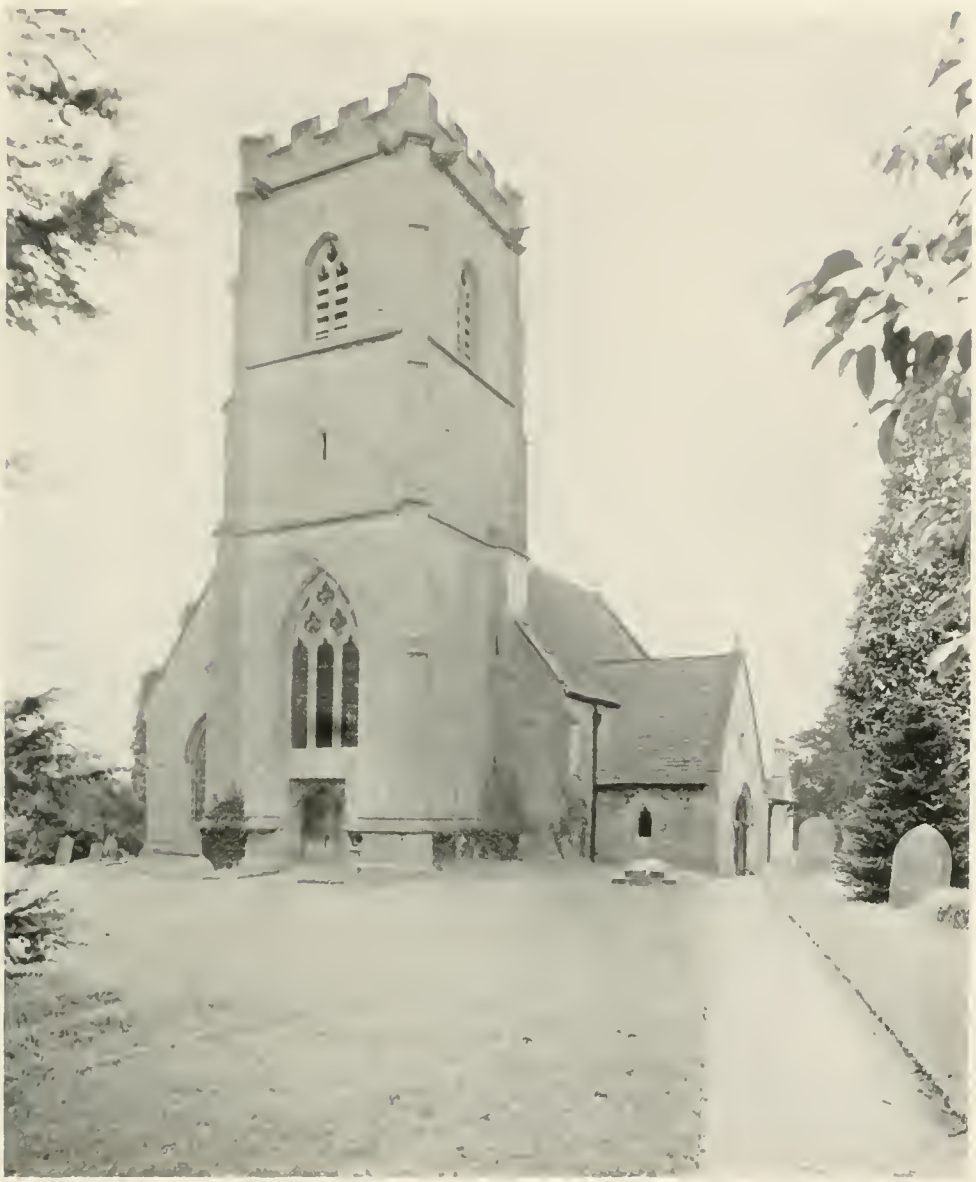


PLATE ONE

BRAMSCOMBE CHURCH, DEVONSHIRE



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BADGEWORTH CHURCH, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

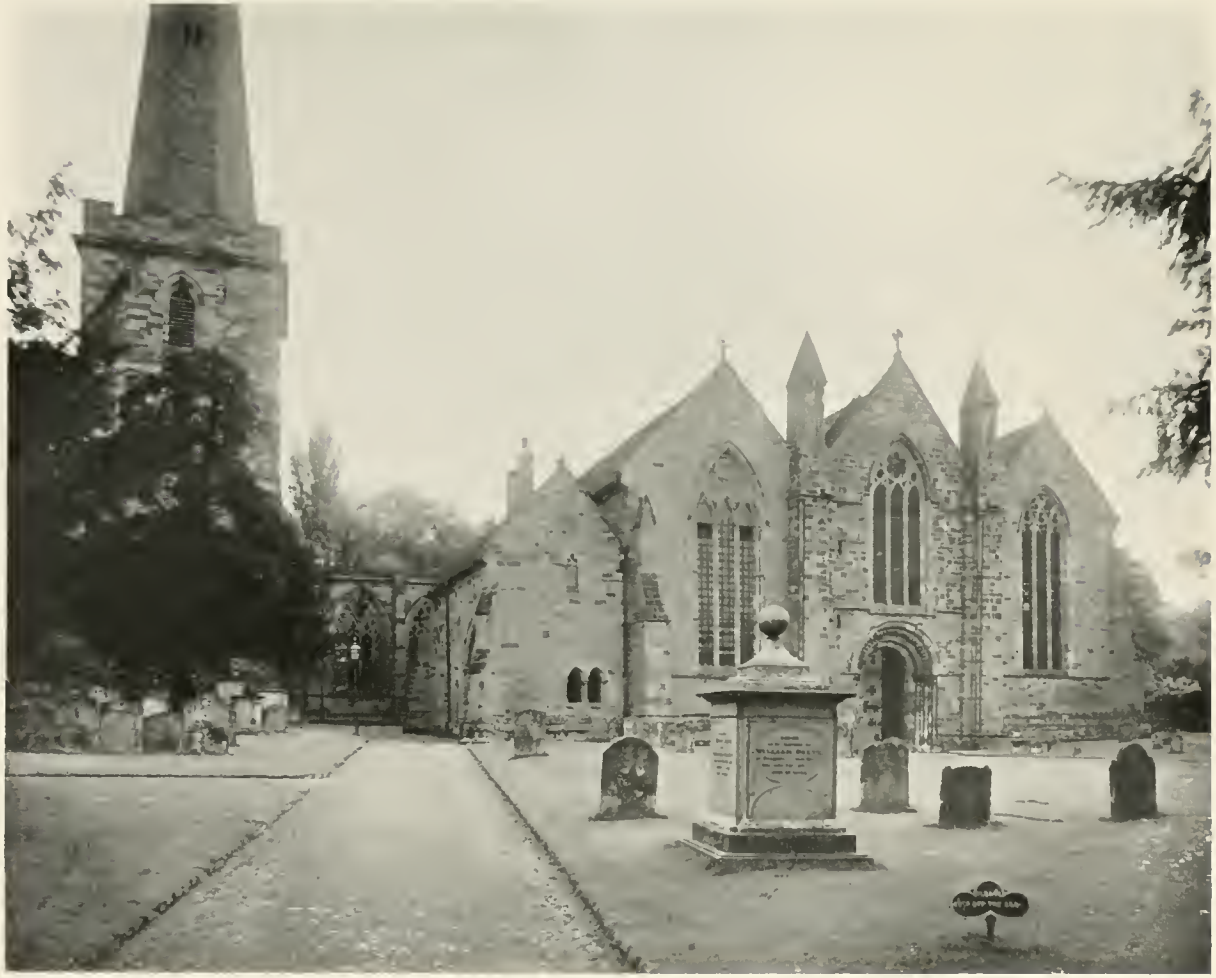


PLATE THREE

LEDBURY CHURCH, HEREFORDSHIRE

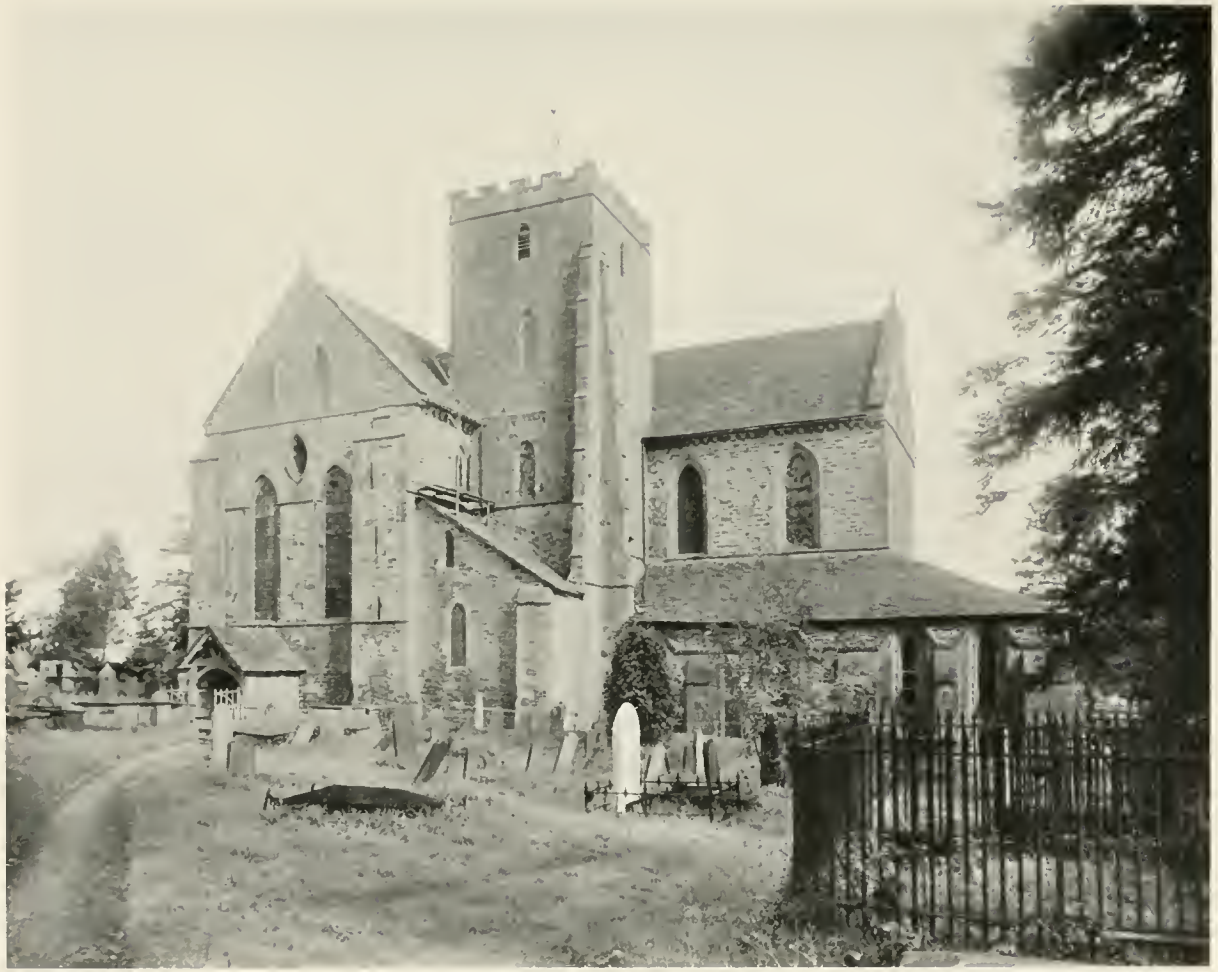
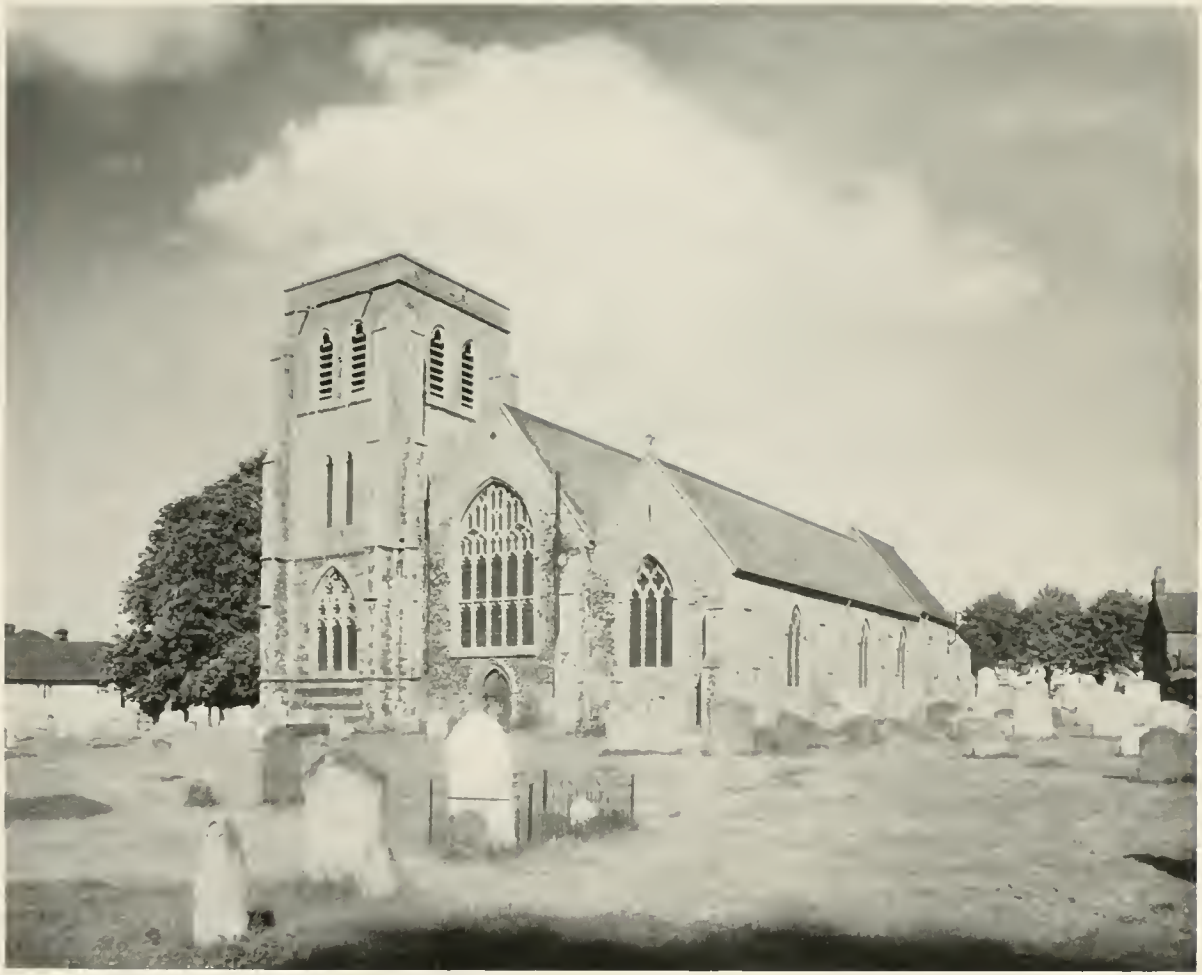


PLATE FOUR

ABBEY DORE CHURCH, HEREFORDSHIRE



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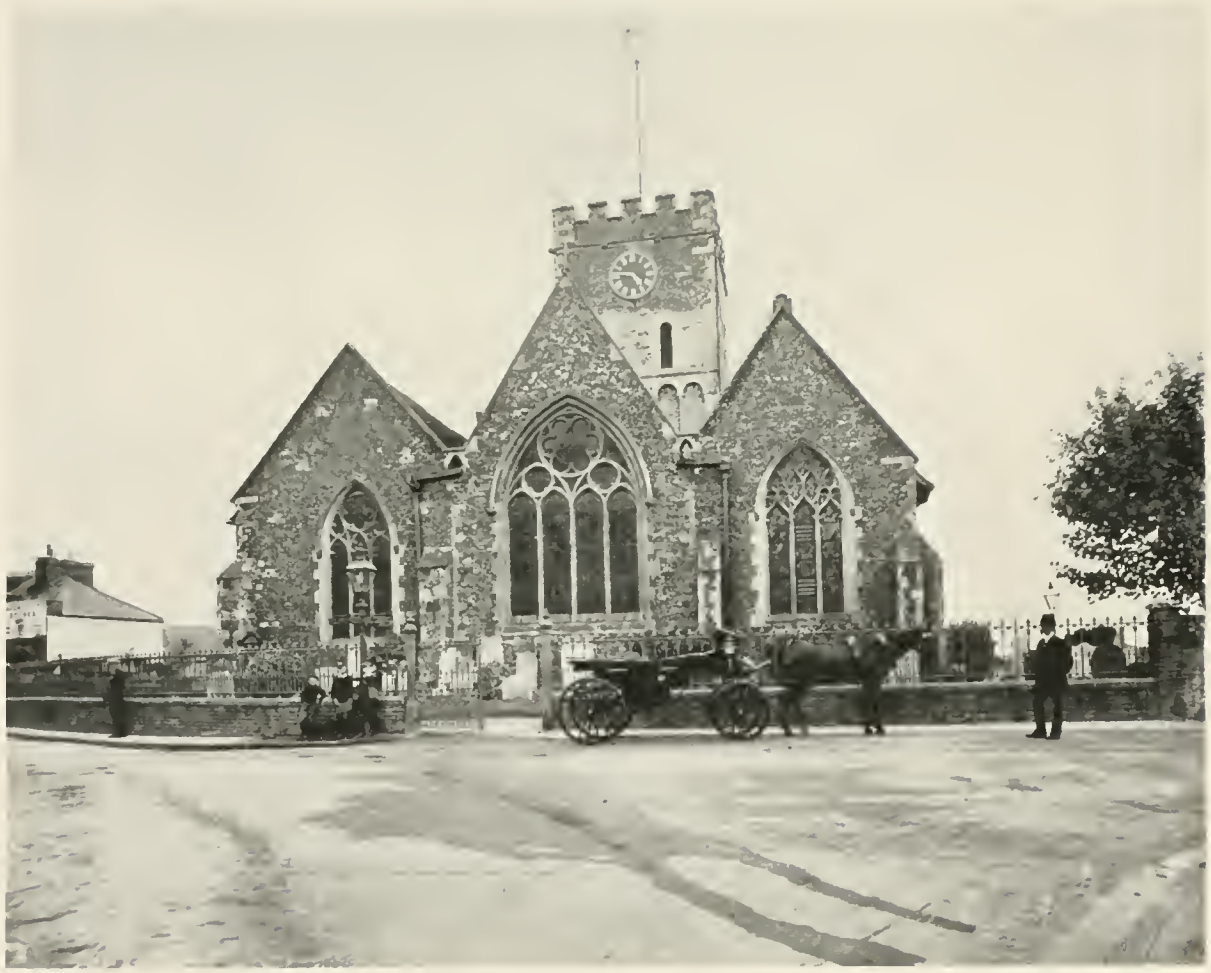
HERNE CHURCH, KENT



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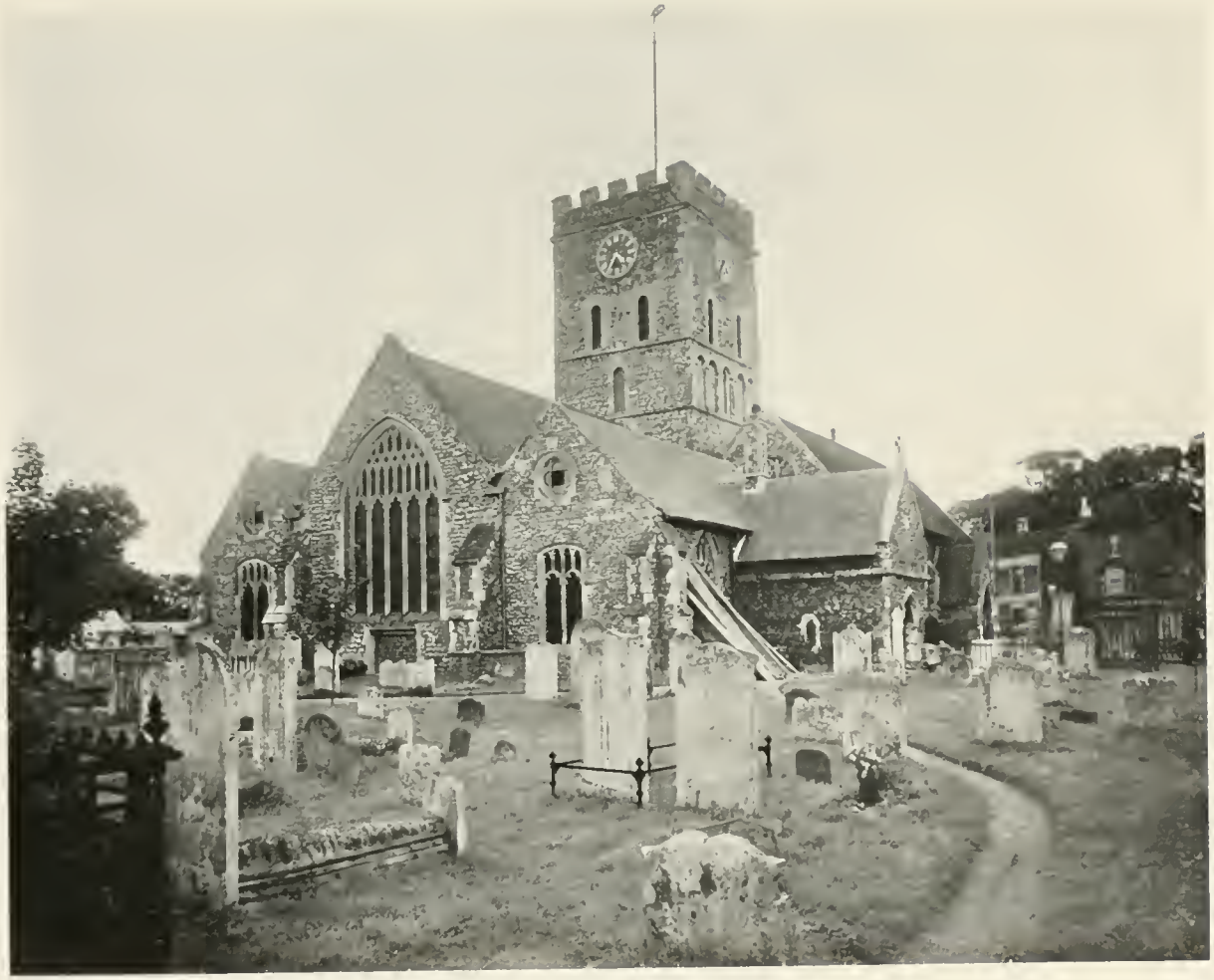
ST. LAWRENCE CHURCH, KENT



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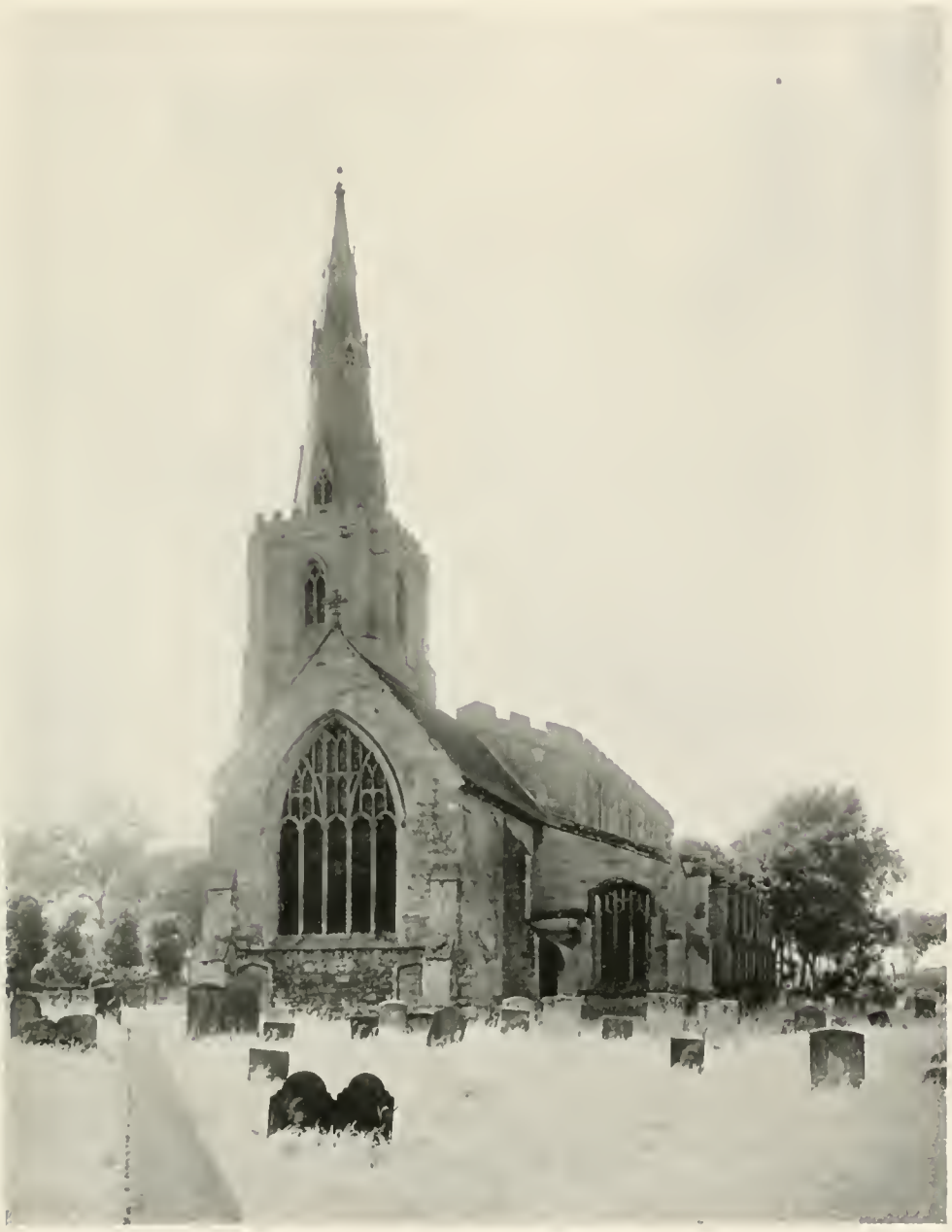
ST. LAWRENCE CHURCH, KENT



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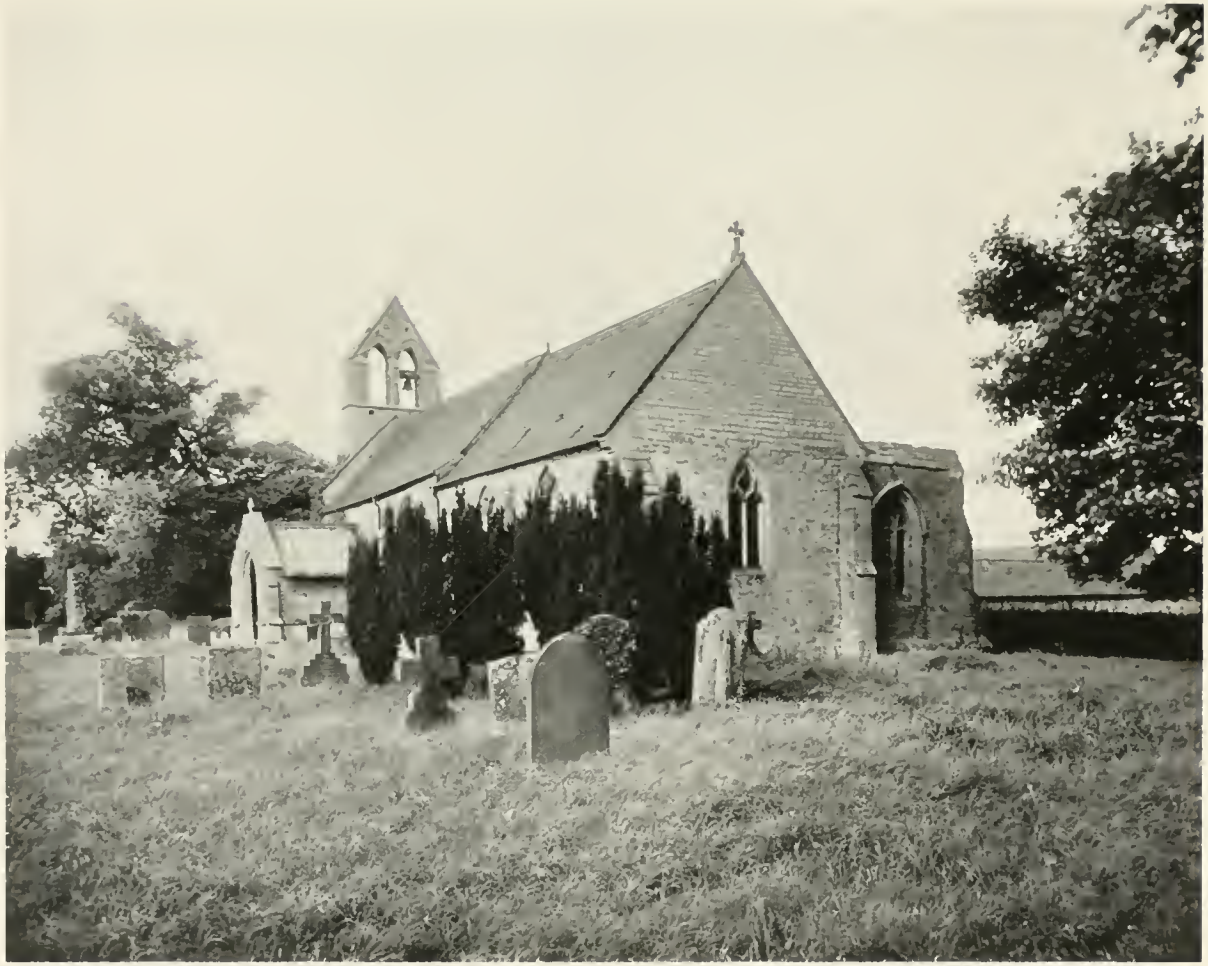
DONINGTON CHURCH, LINCOLNSHIRE



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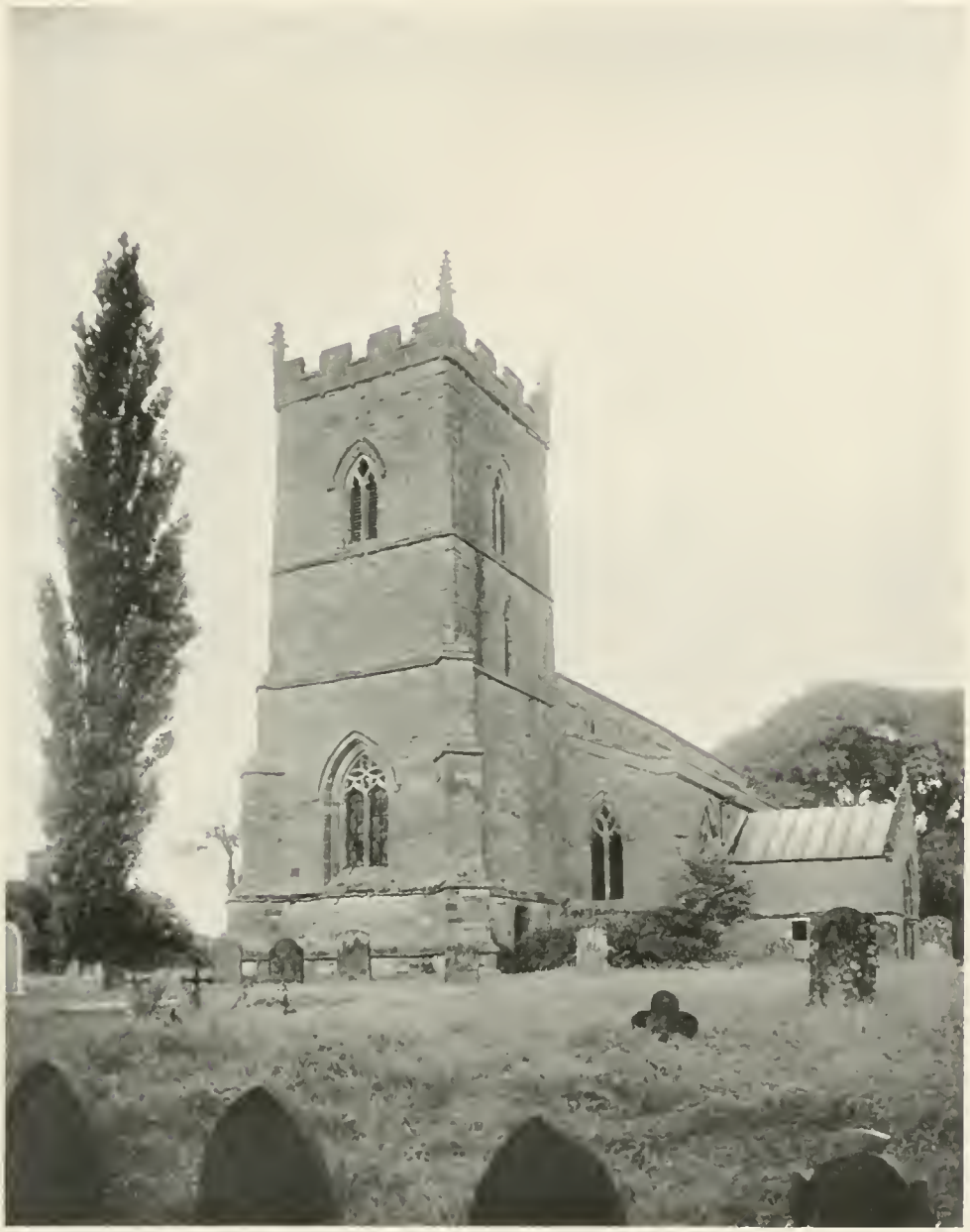
HOWELL CHURCH, LINCOLNSHIRE



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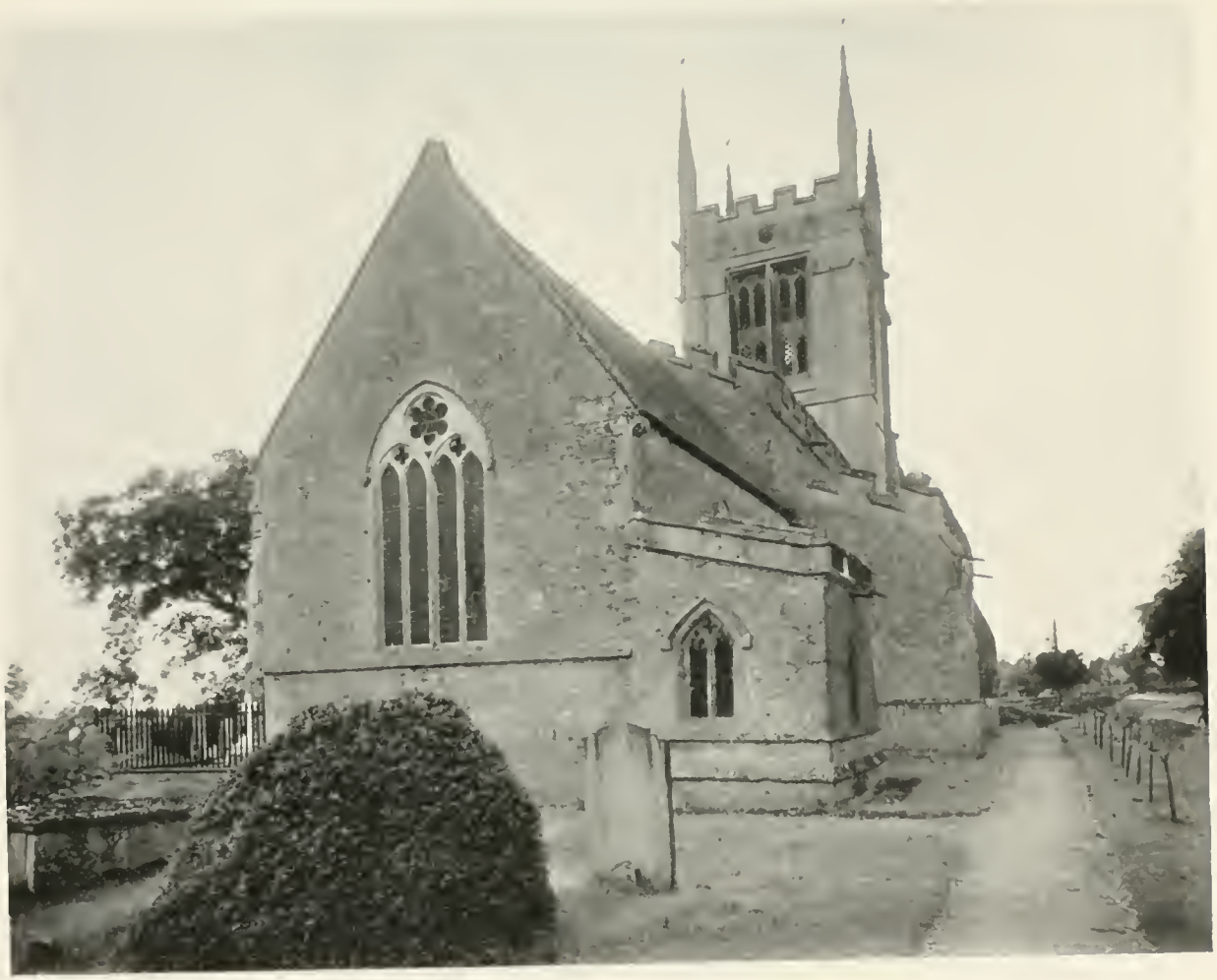
BRAMPTON CHURCH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



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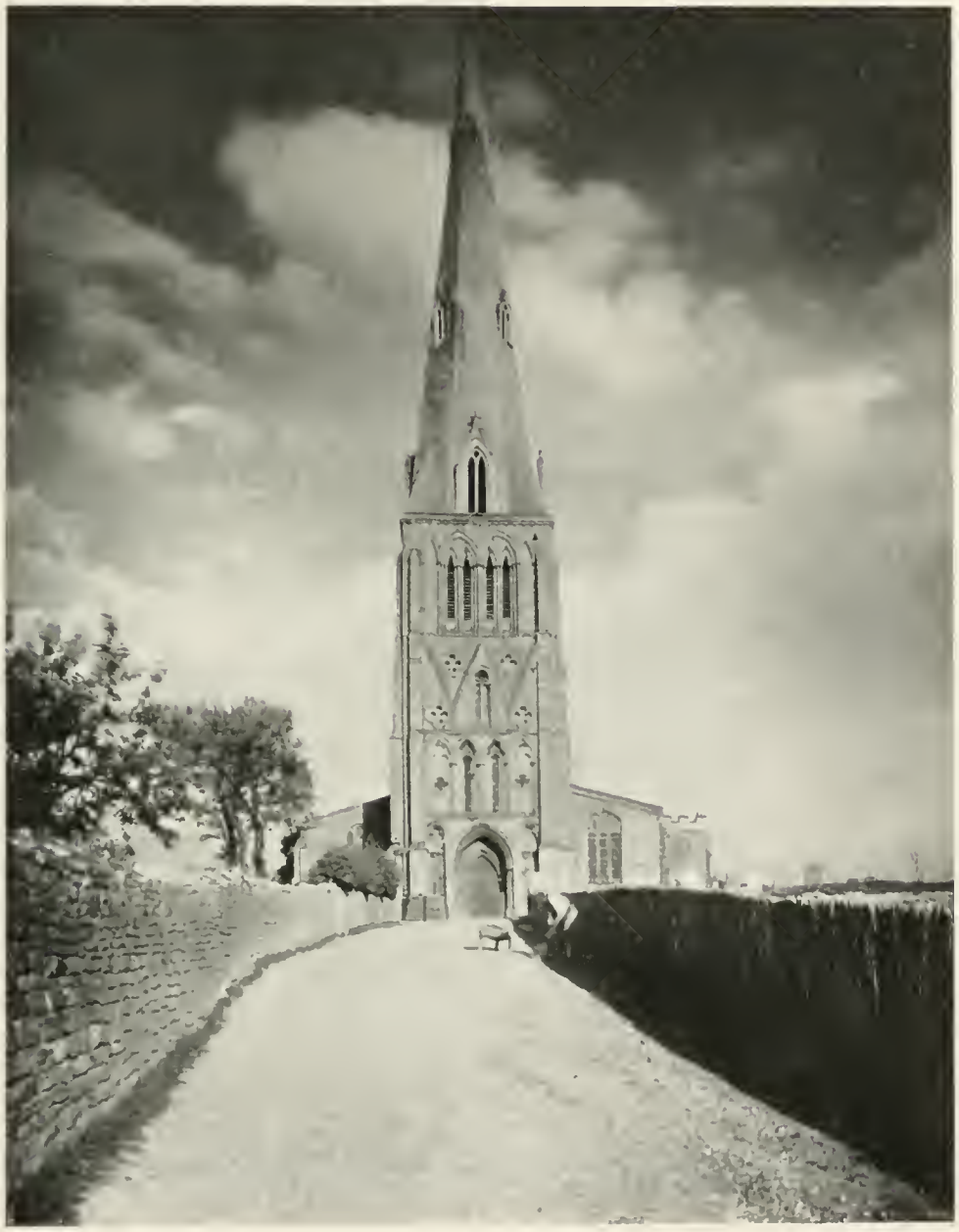
ALDWINCLE CHURCH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



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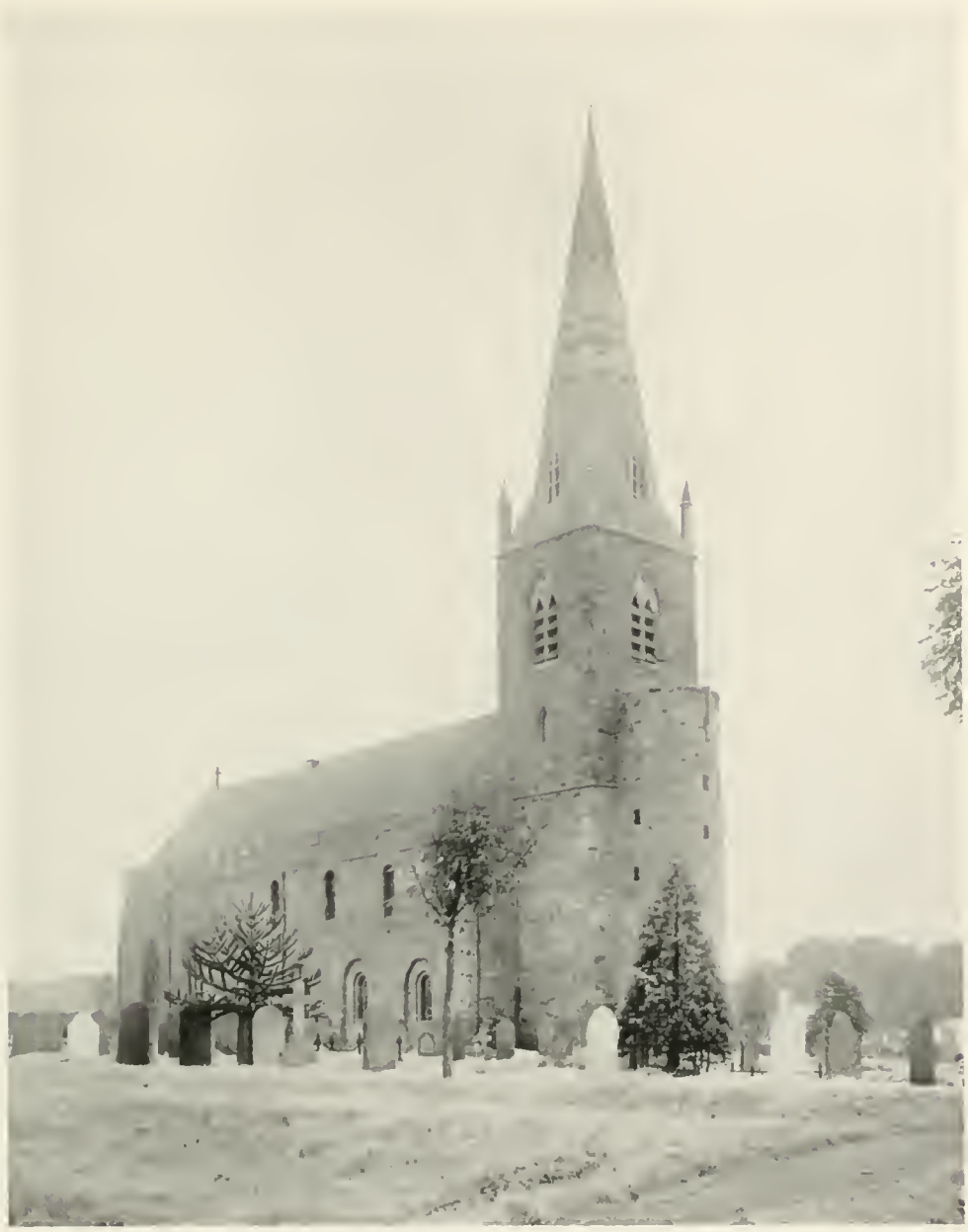

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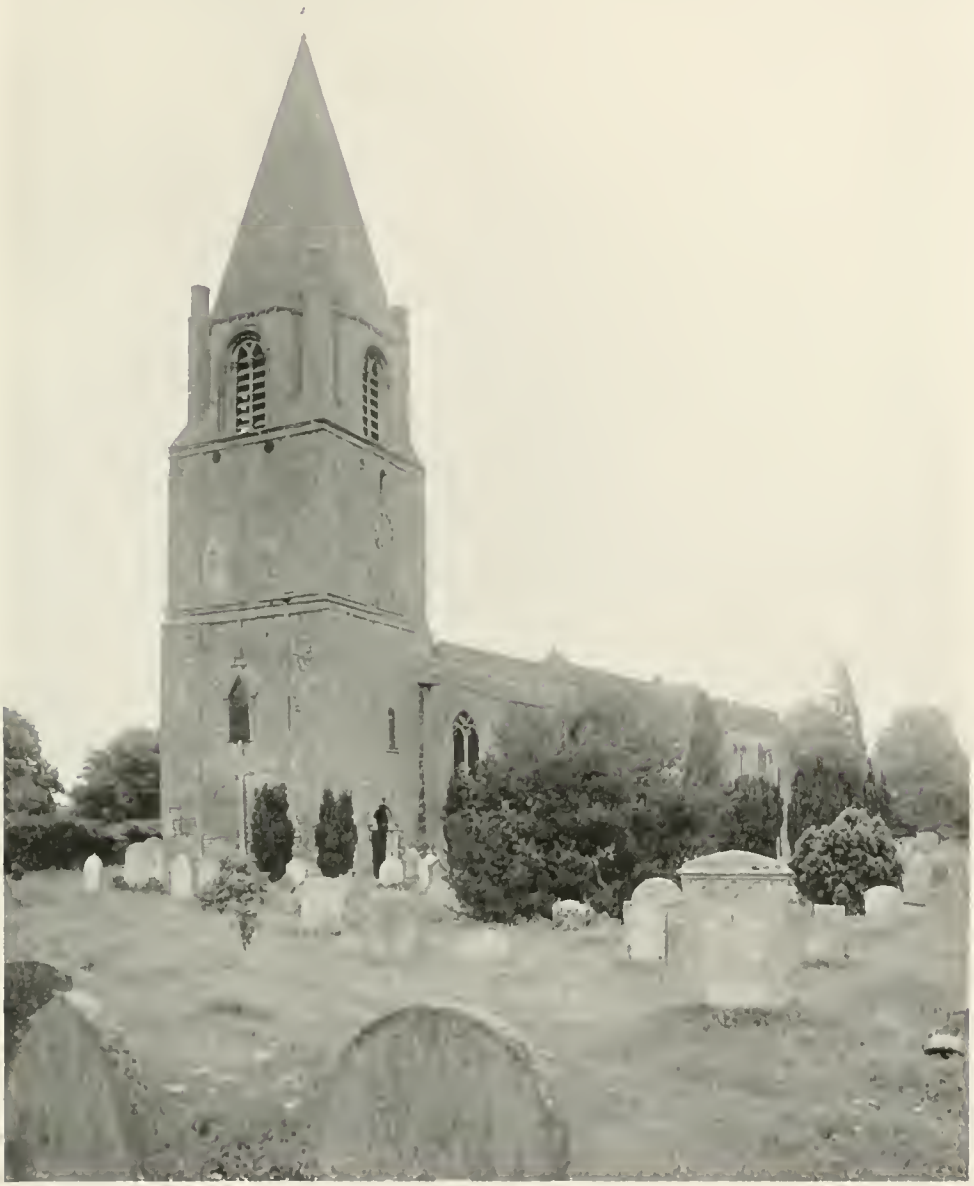

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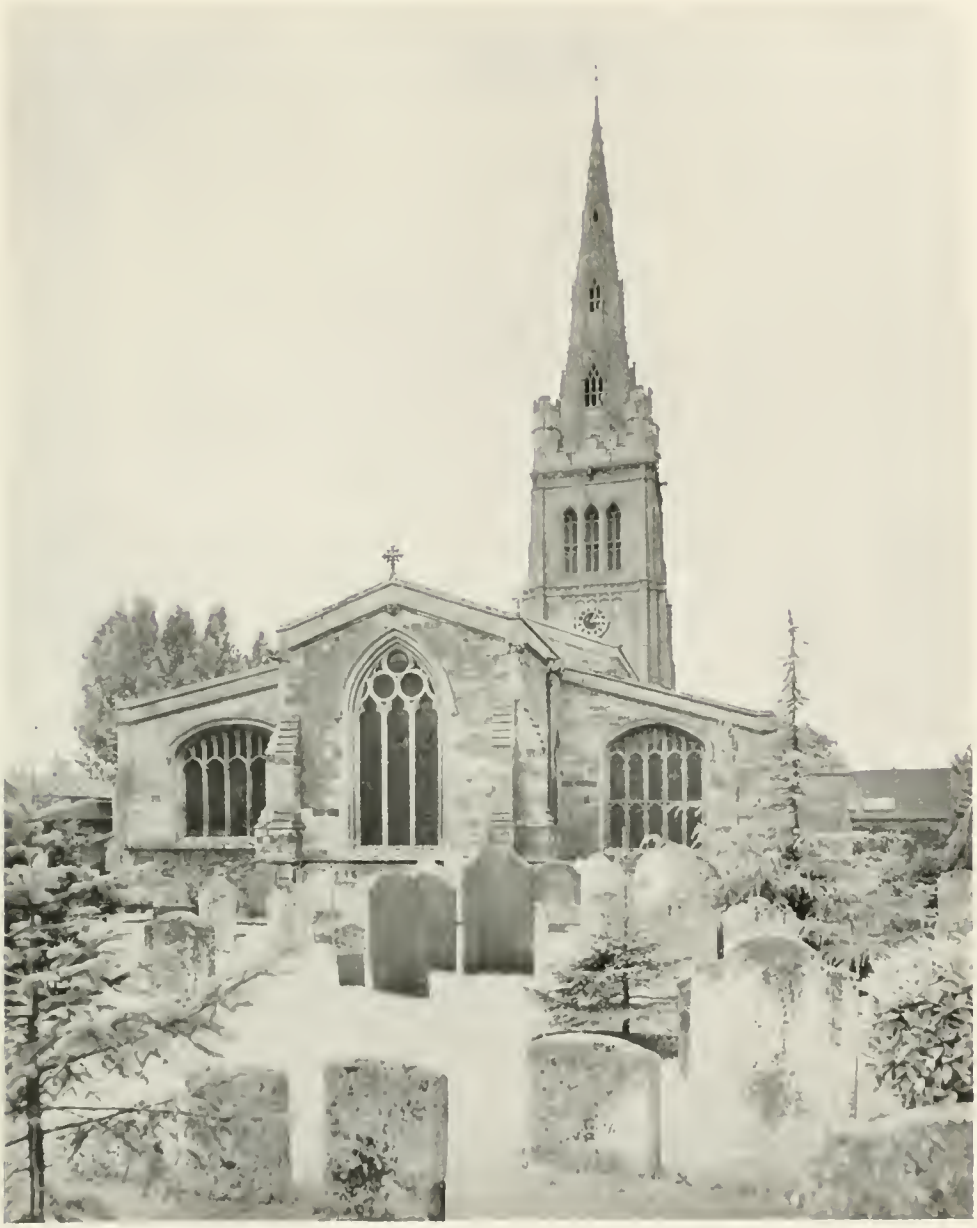

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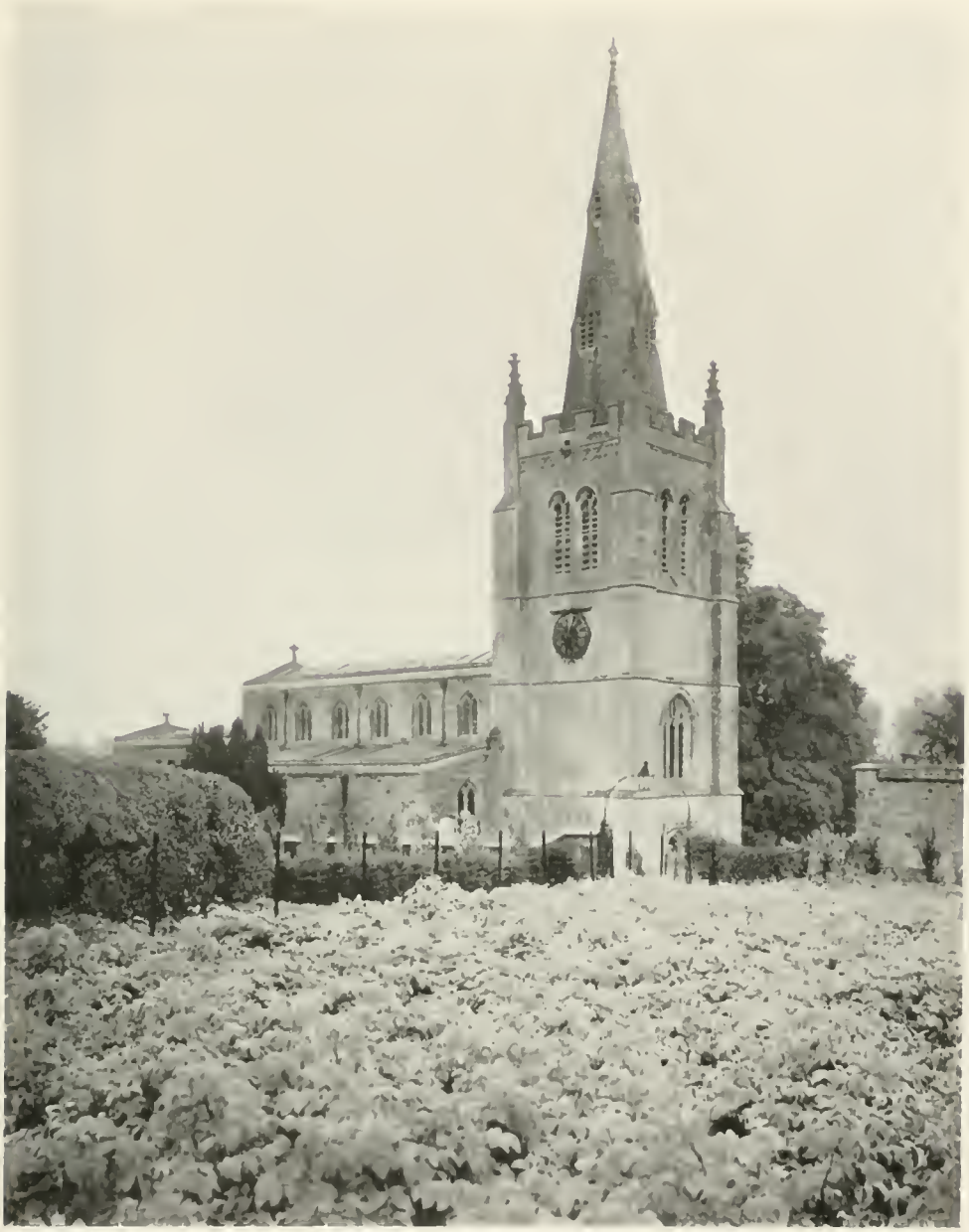
KETTERING CHURCH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



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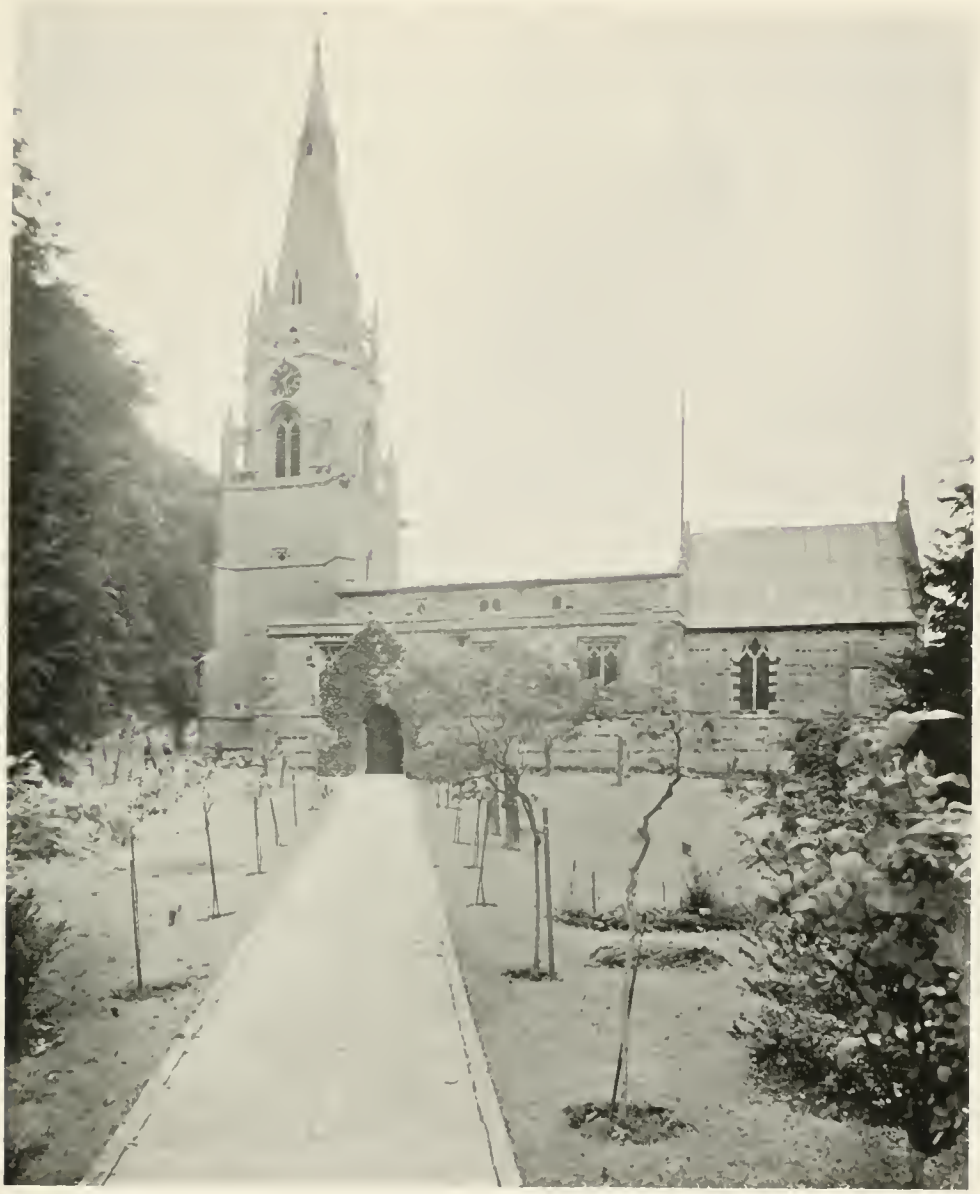
CRANSLEY CHURCH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



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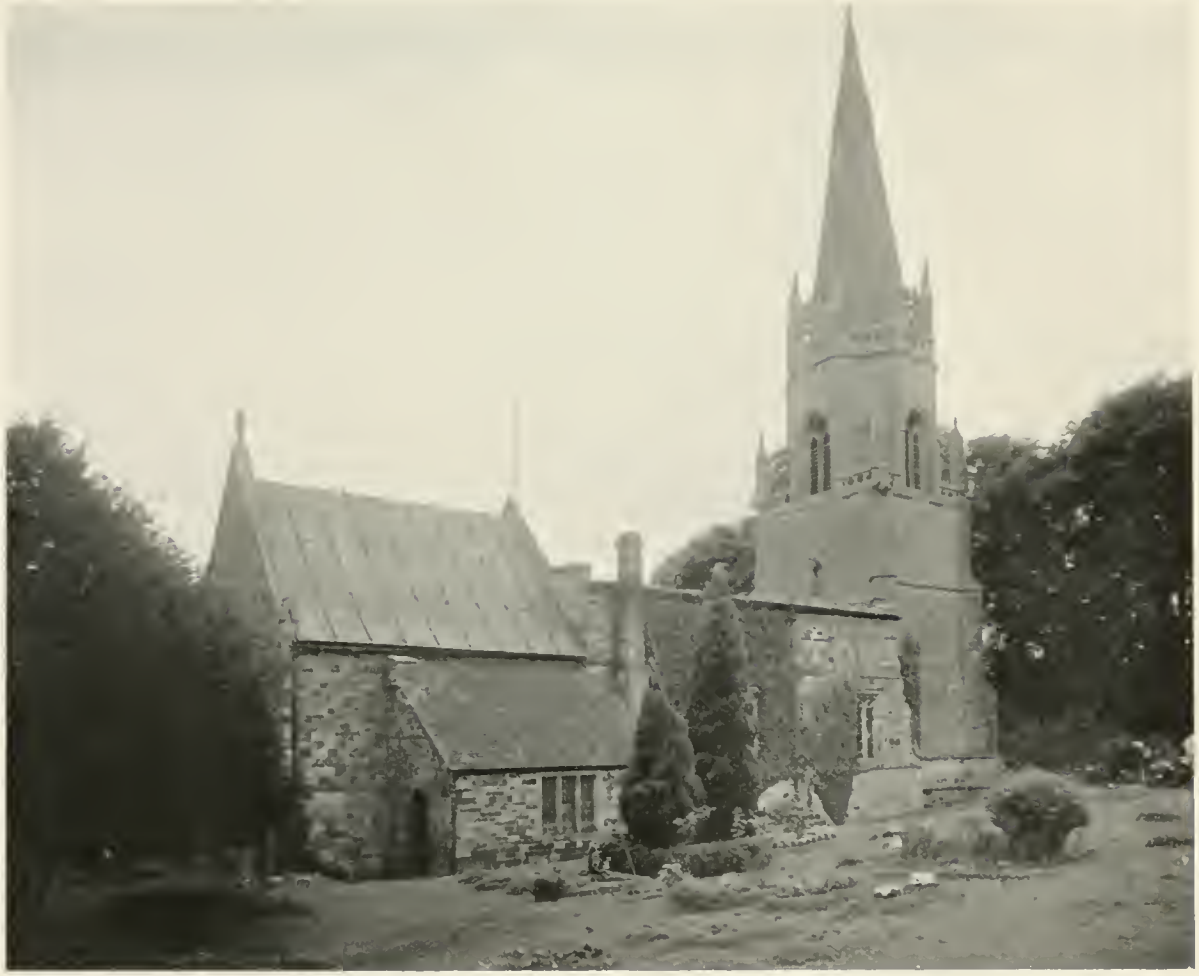
WILBY CHURCH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



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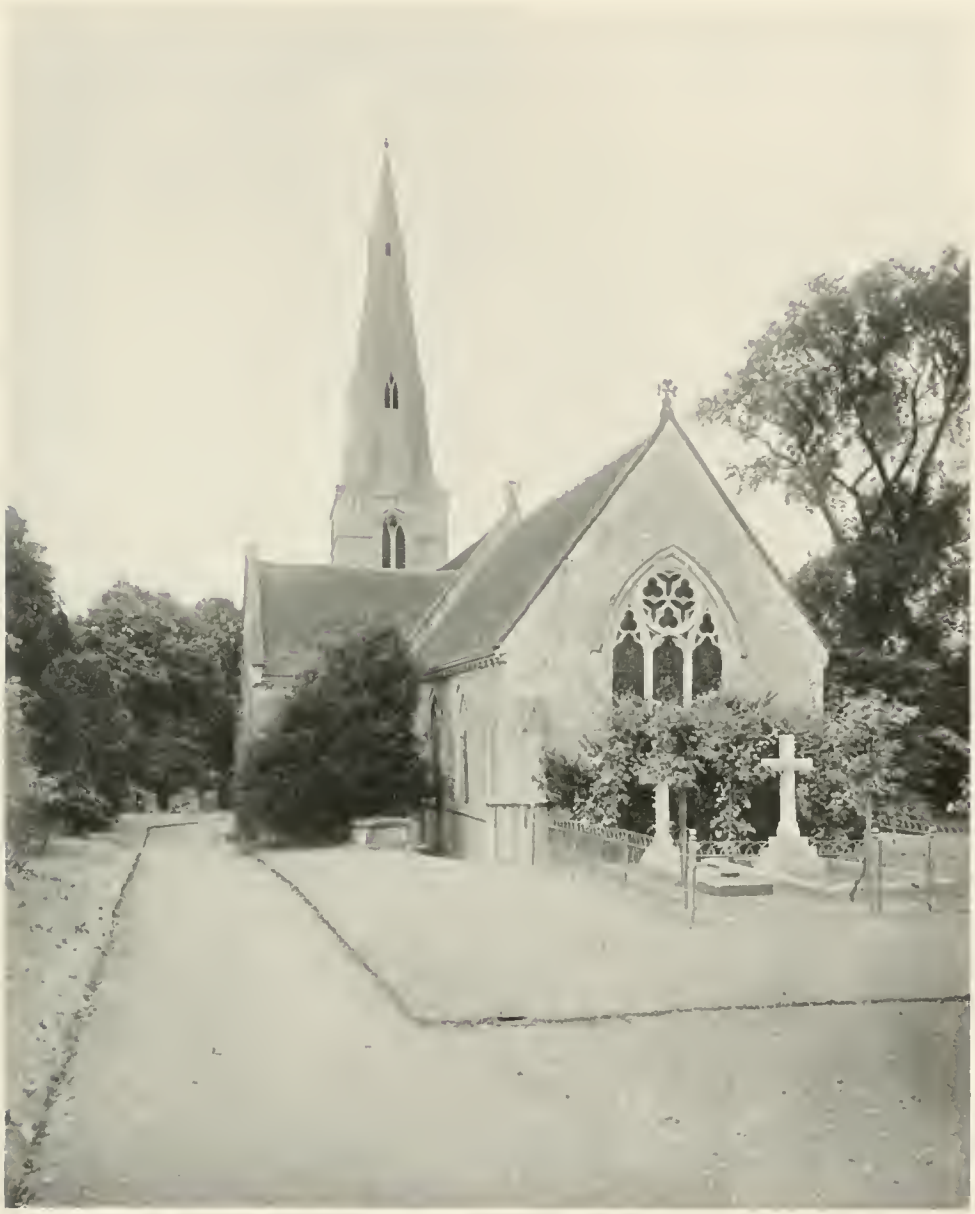

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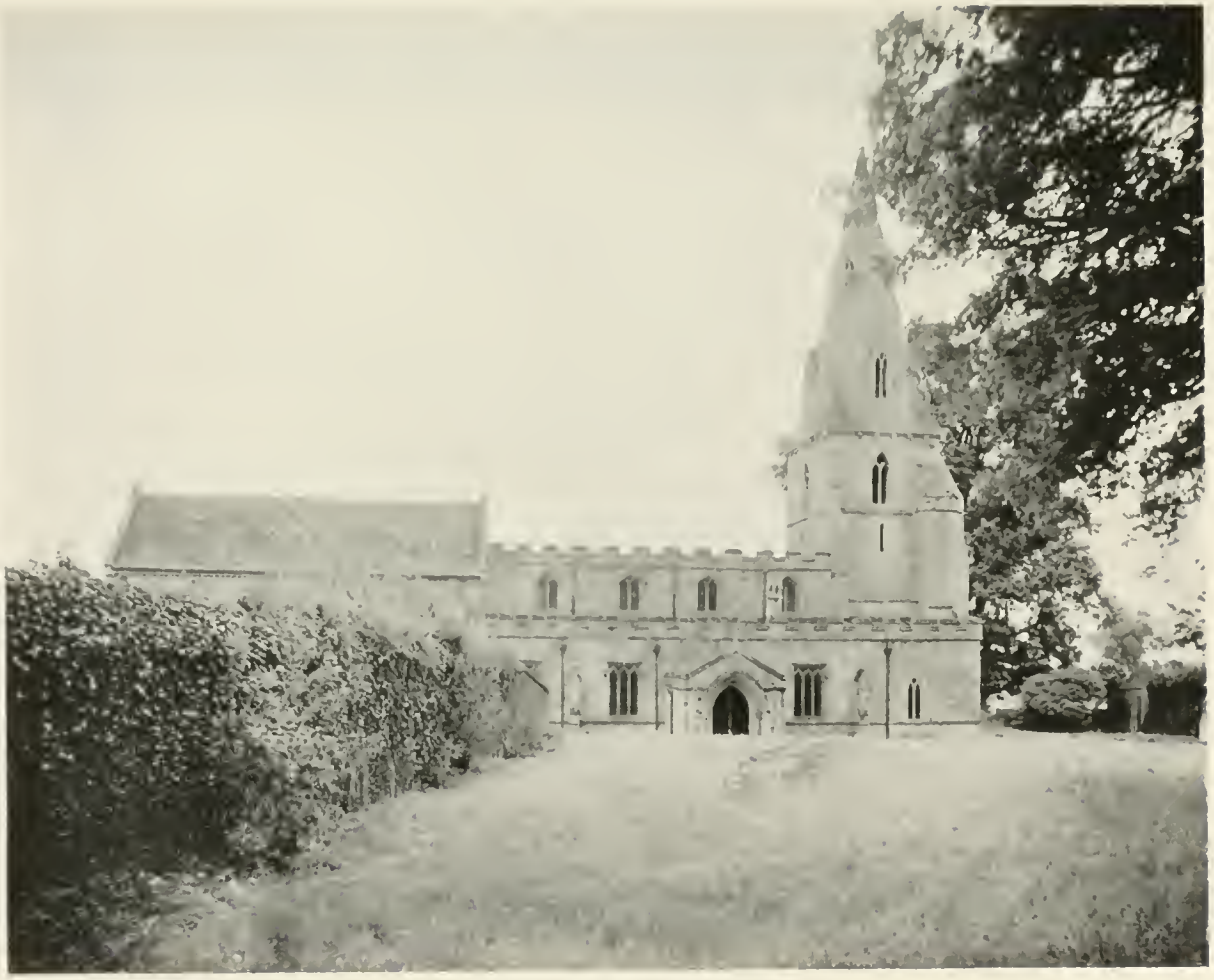
ACHURCH CHURCH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



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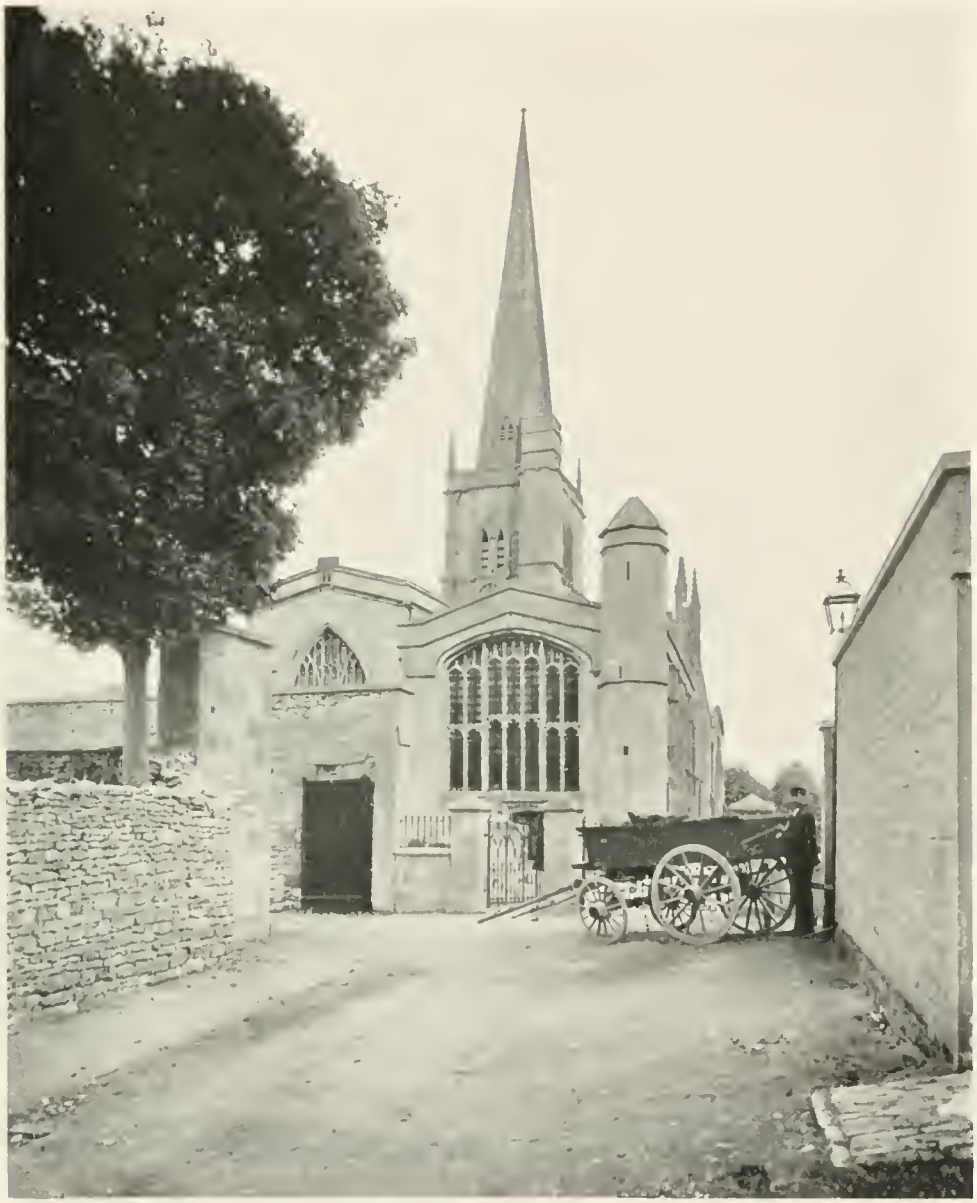
NORTH LUFFENHAM CHURCH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



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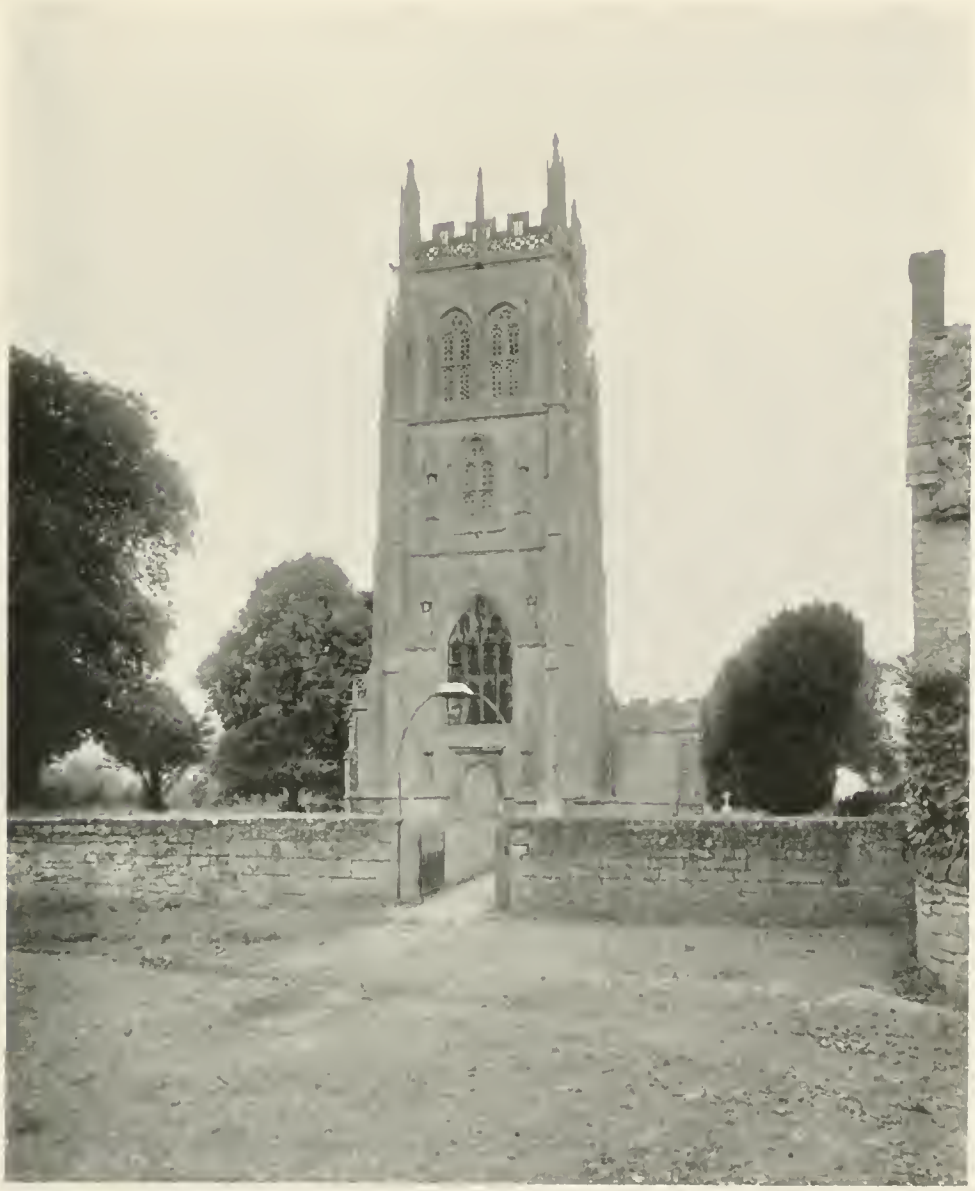
BURFORD CHURCH, OXFORDSHIRE



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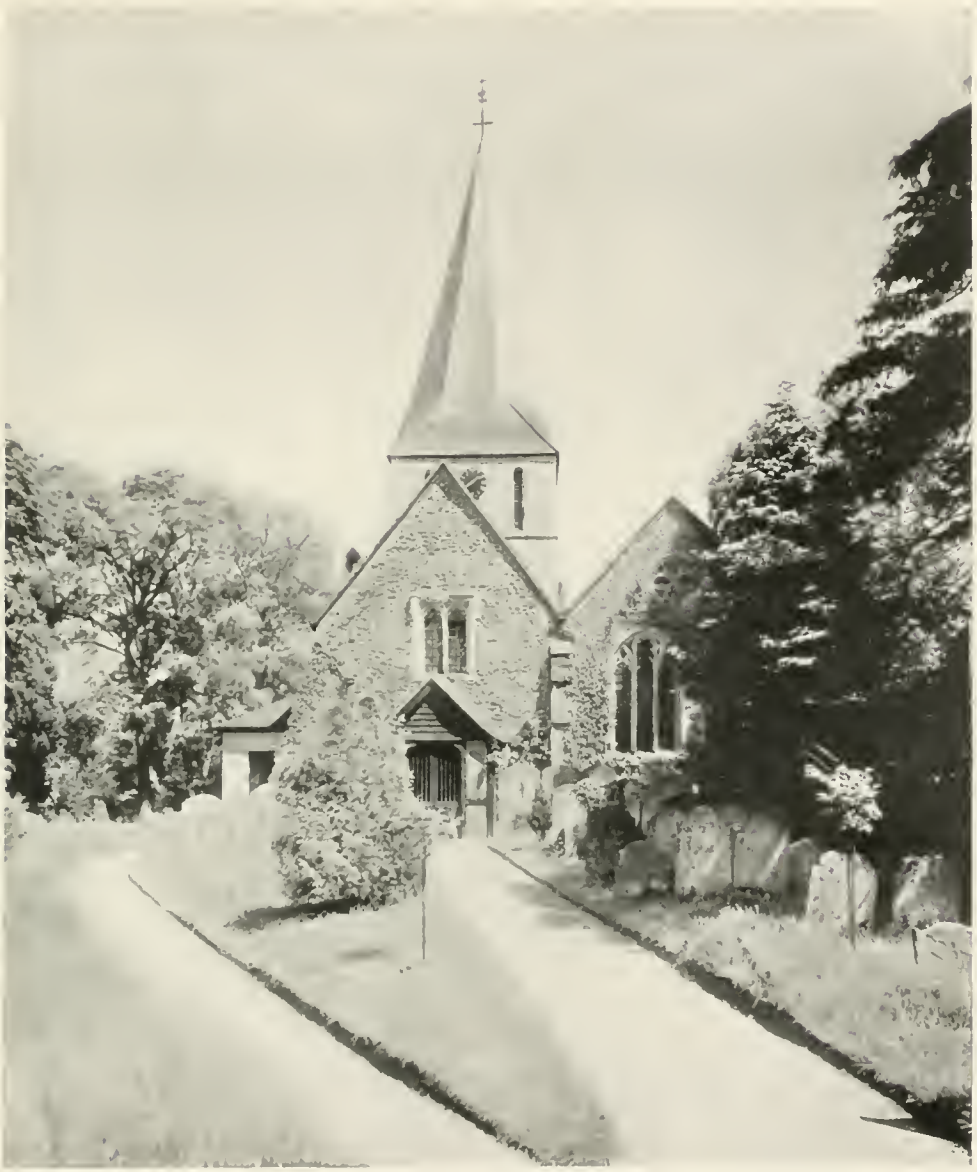
ISLE ABBOTS CHURCH, SOMERSETSHIRE



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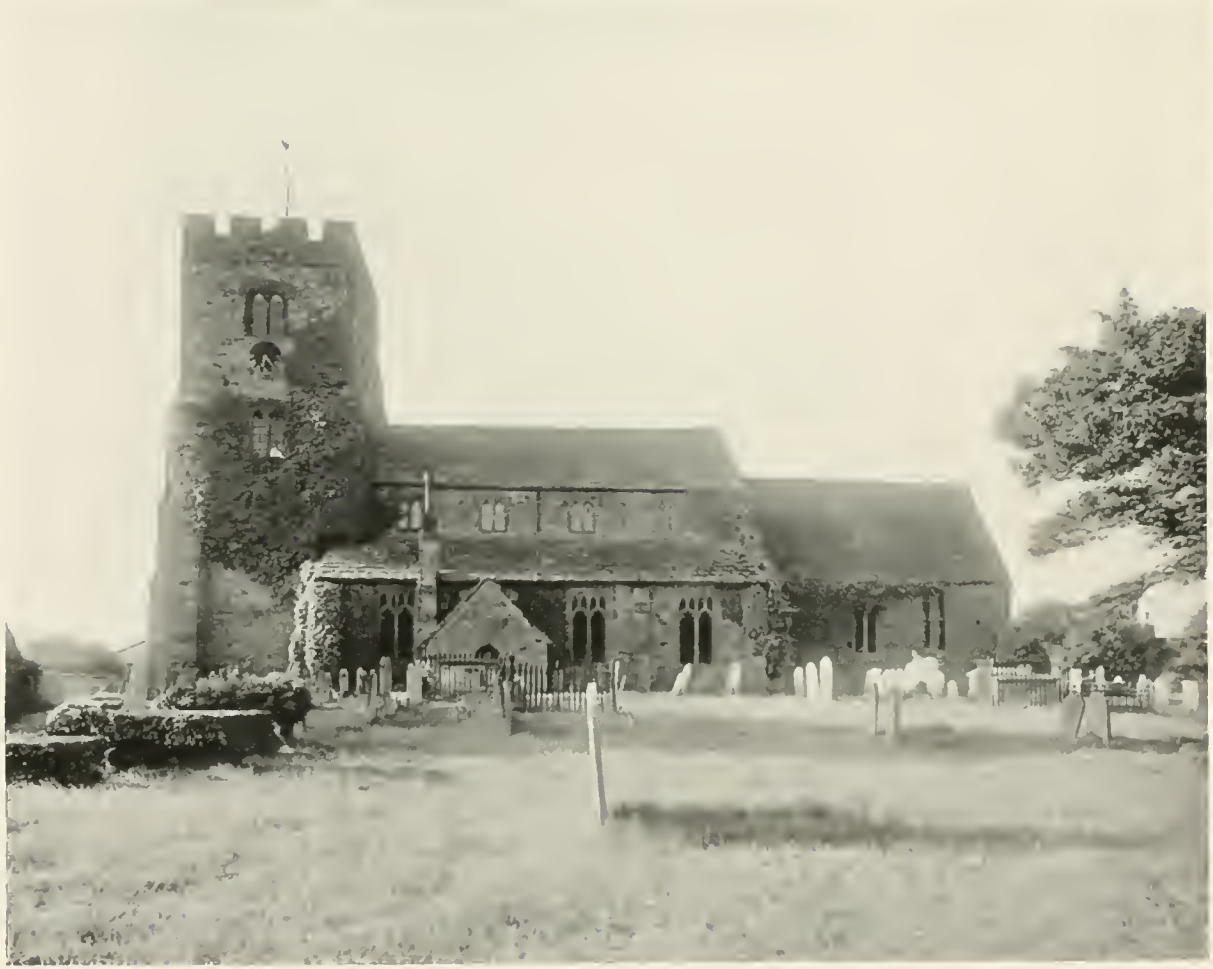
SHERE CHURCH, SURREY



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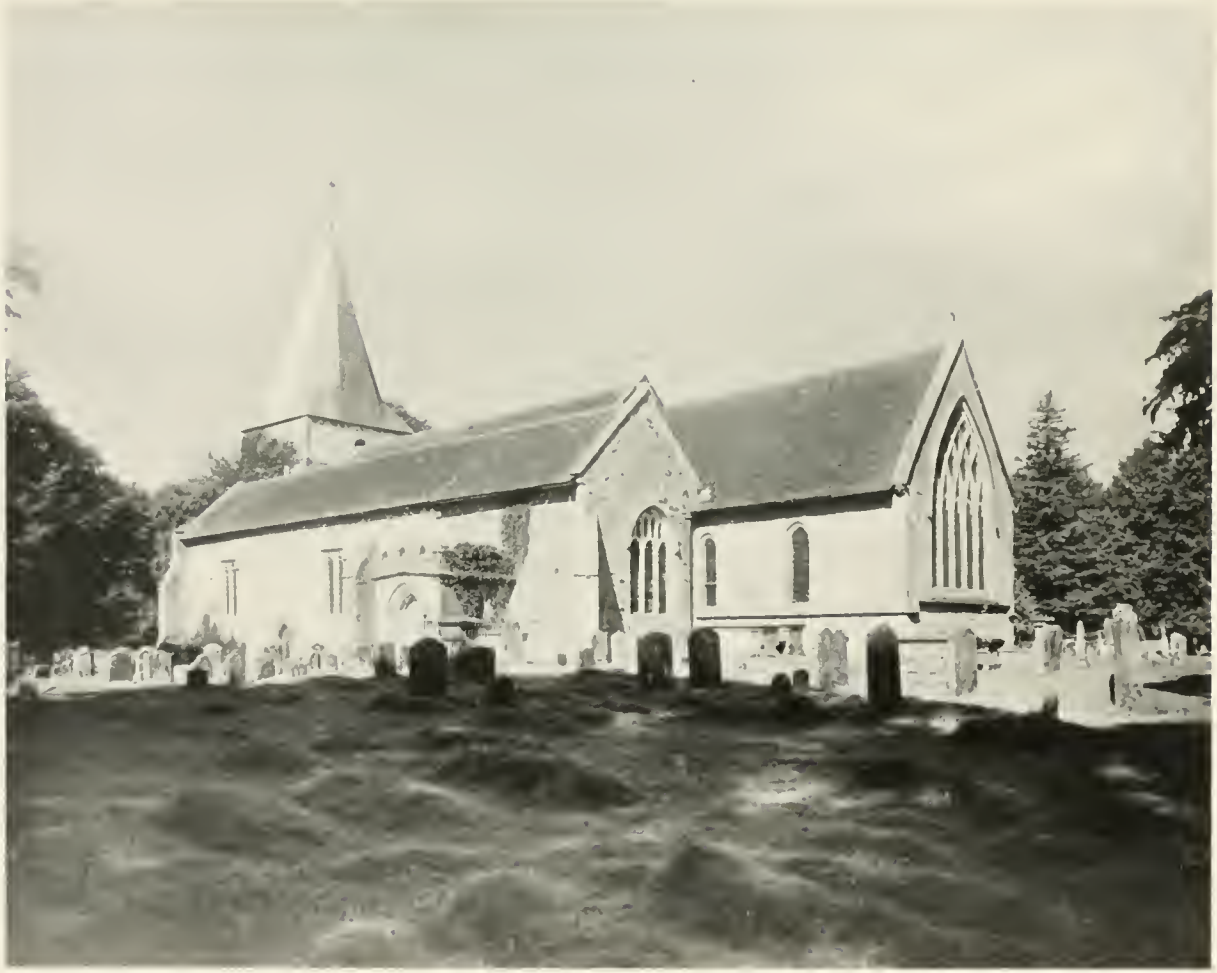
PULBOROUGH CHURCH, SUSSEX



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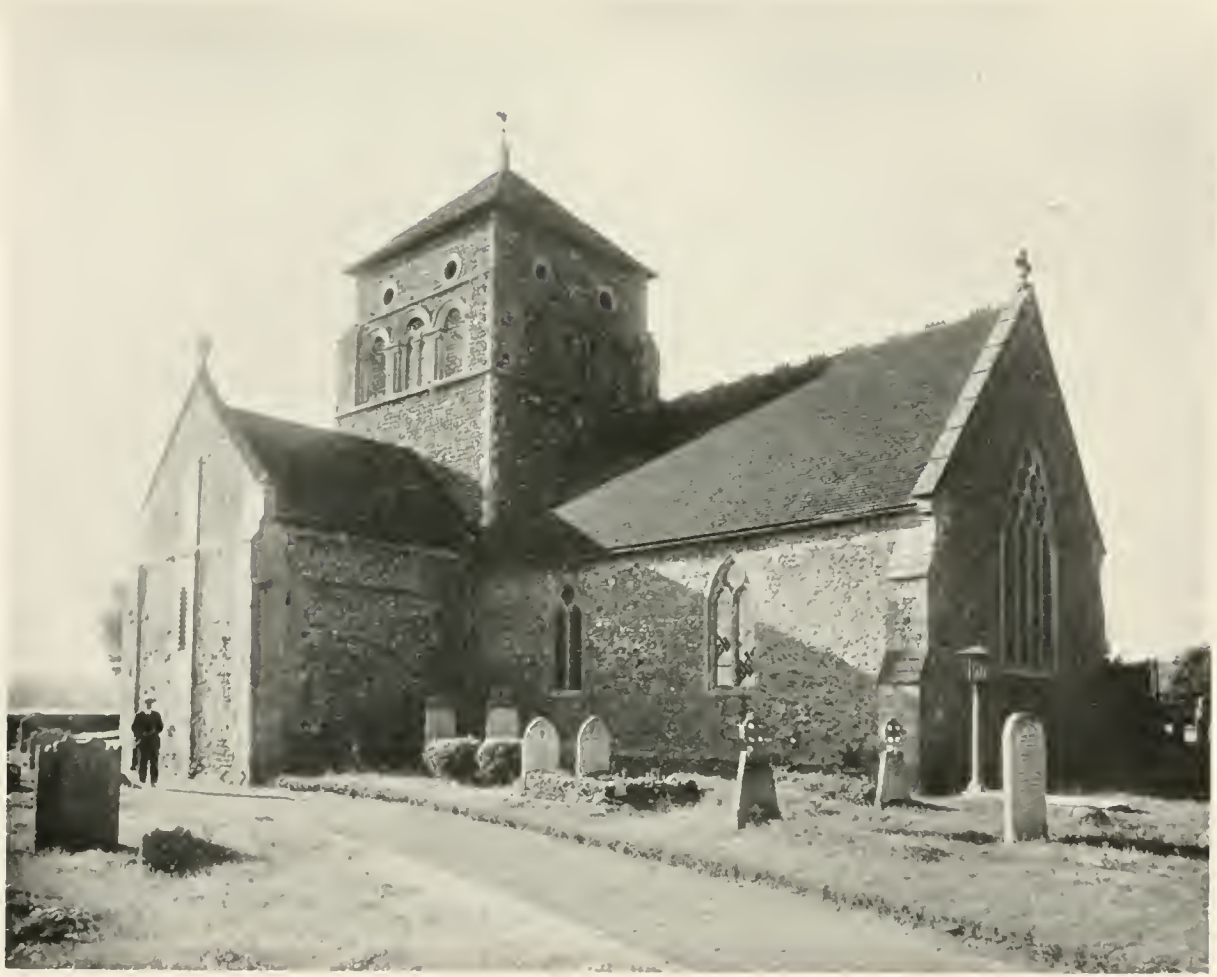

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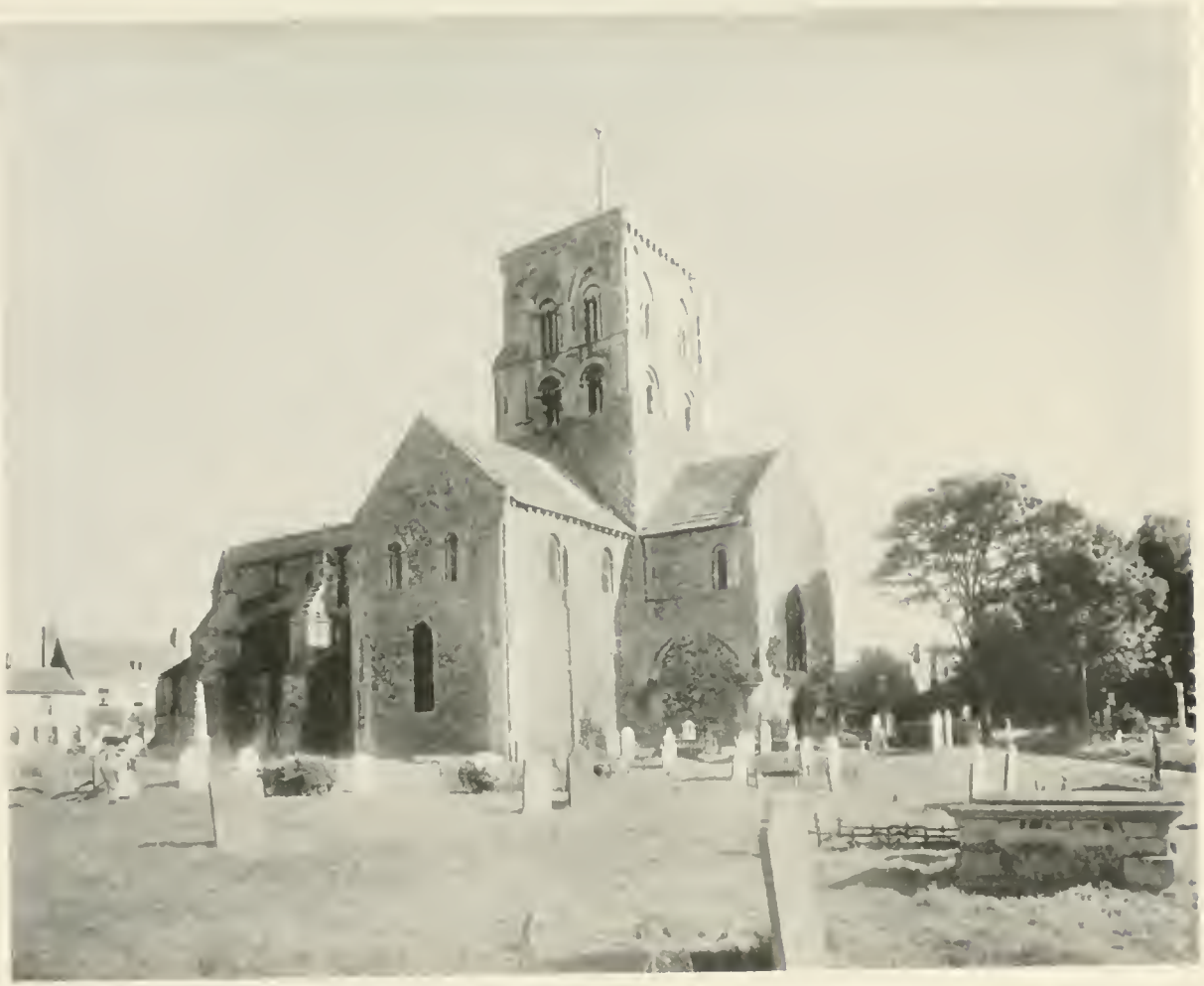
OLD SHOREHAM CHURCH, SUSSEX



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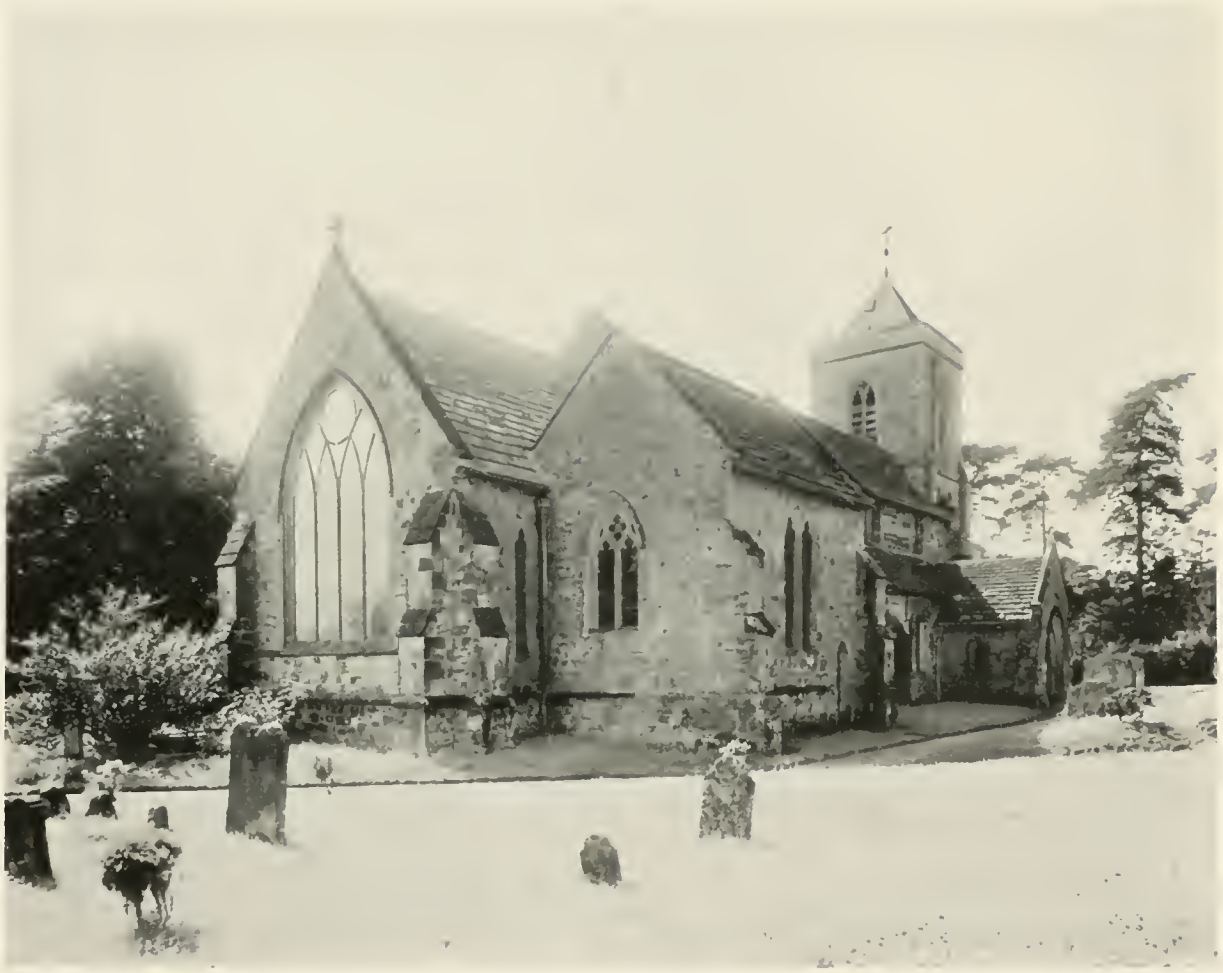

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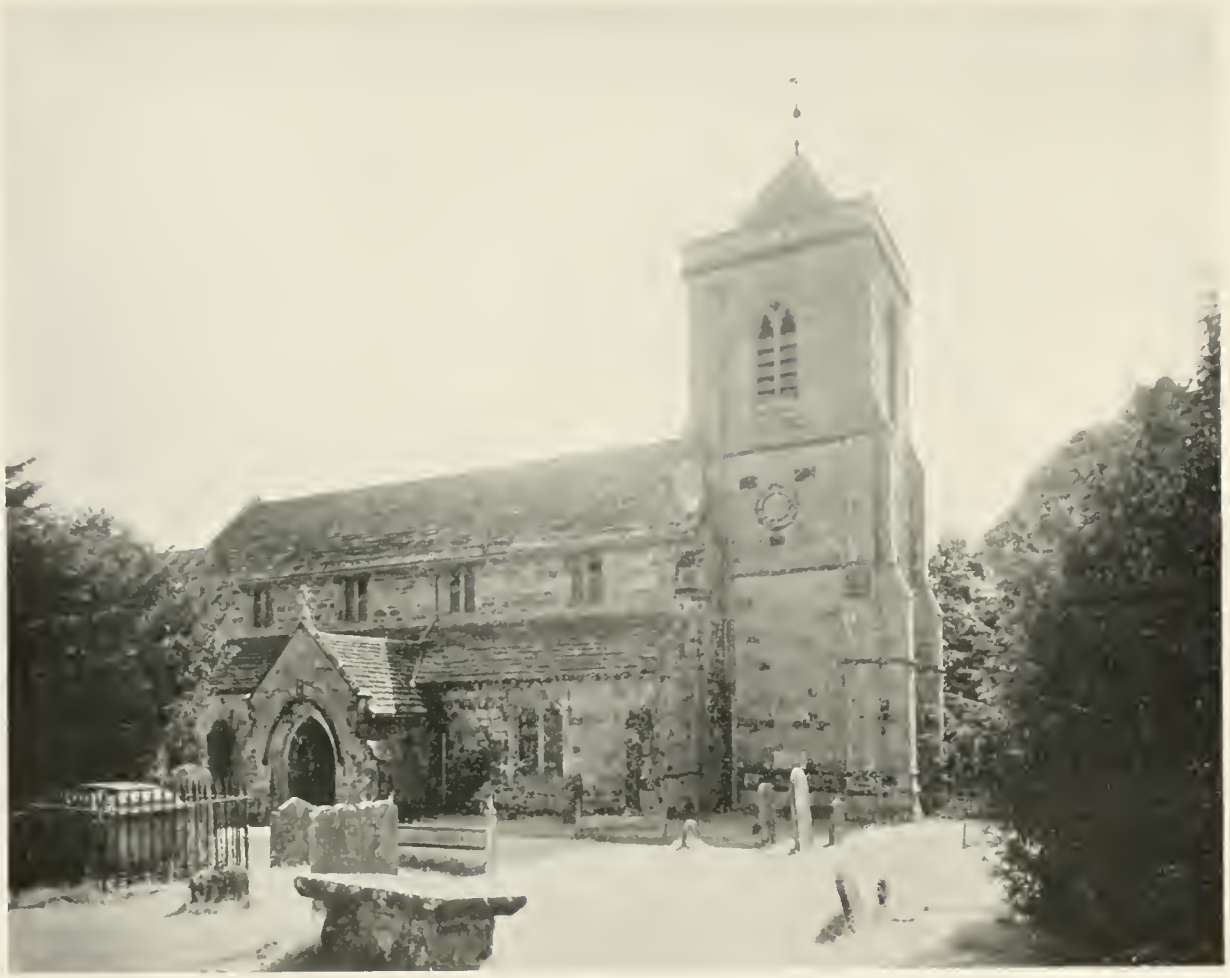

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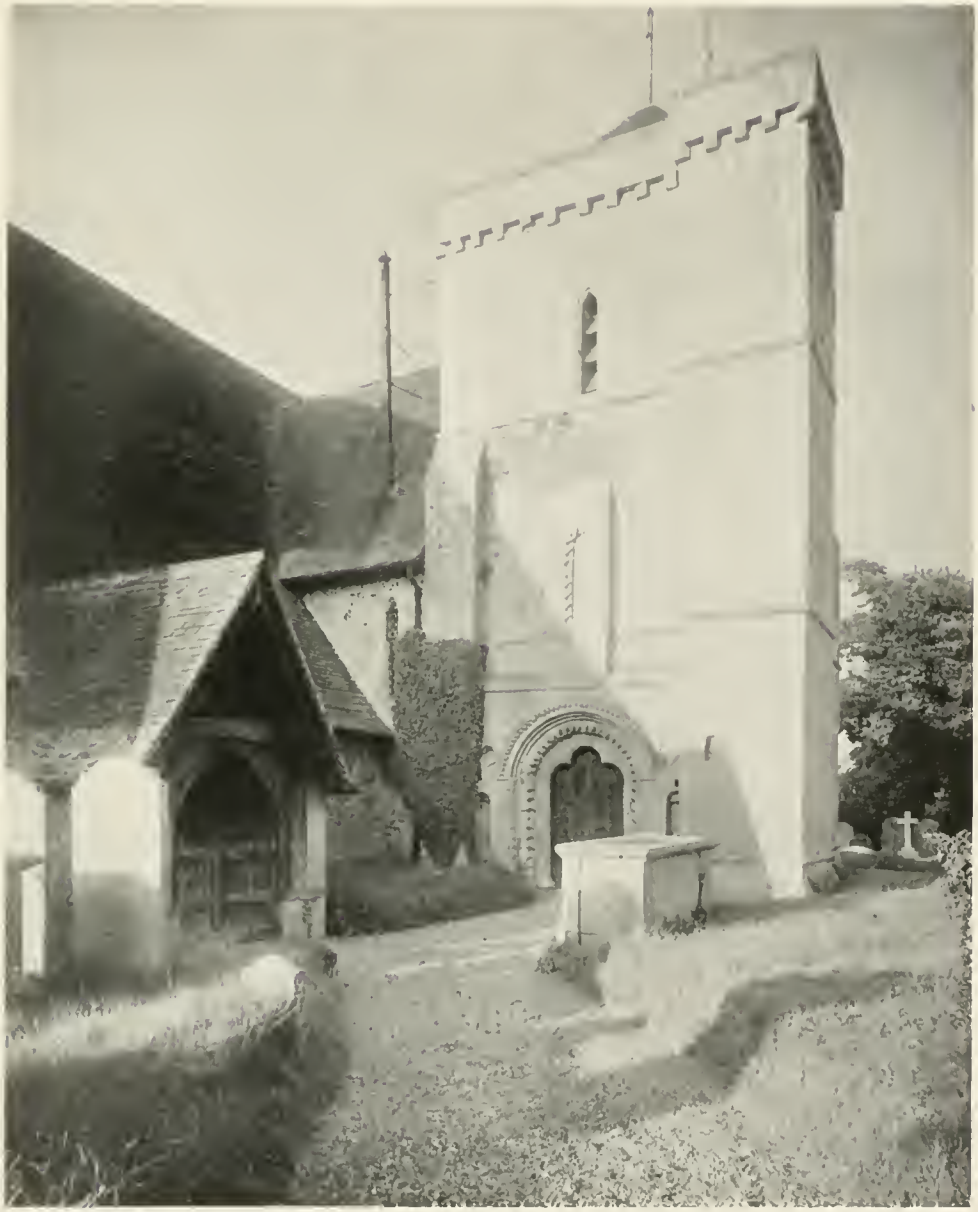
FRAMFIELD CHURCH, SUSSEX



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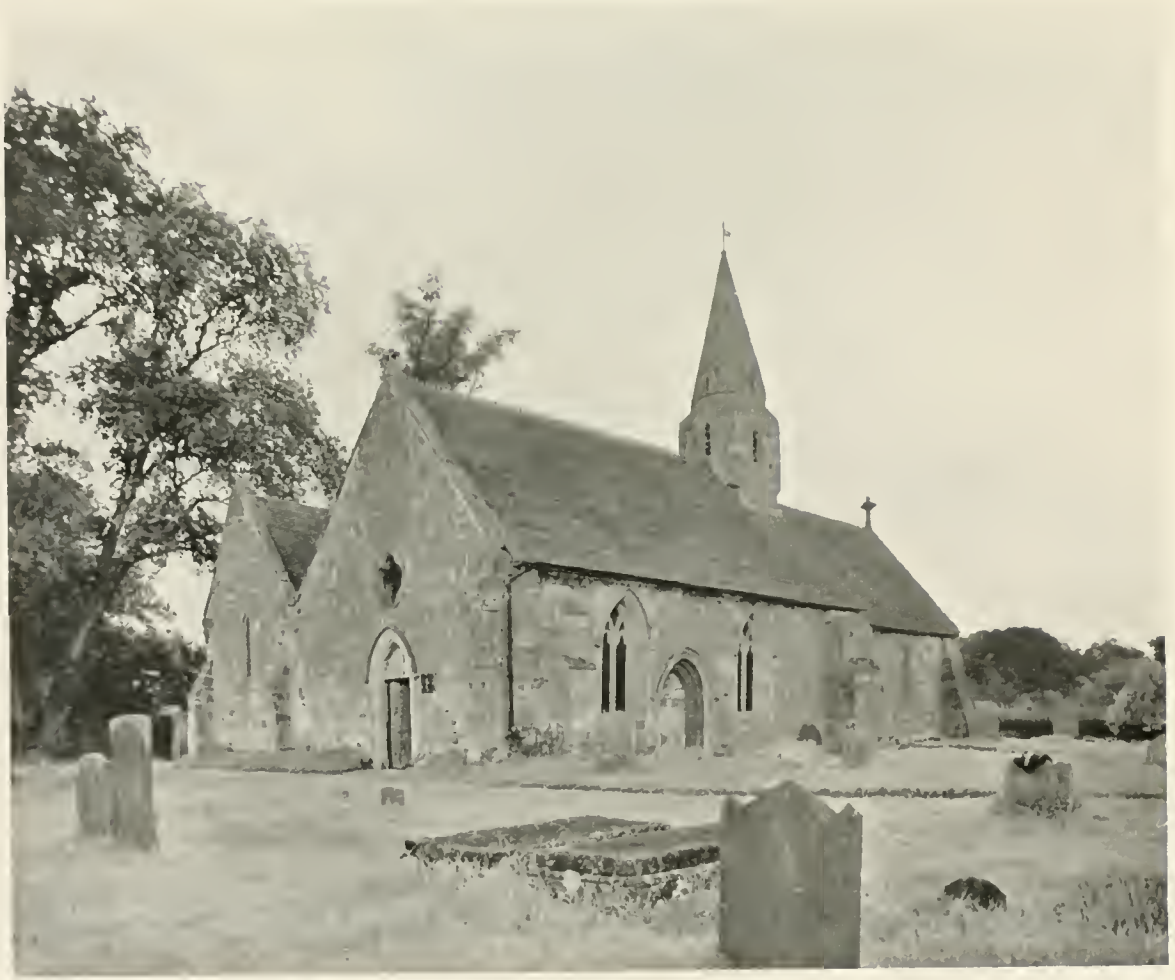
CLYMPING CHURCH, SUSSEX



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BAGINTON CHURCH, WARWICKSHIRE

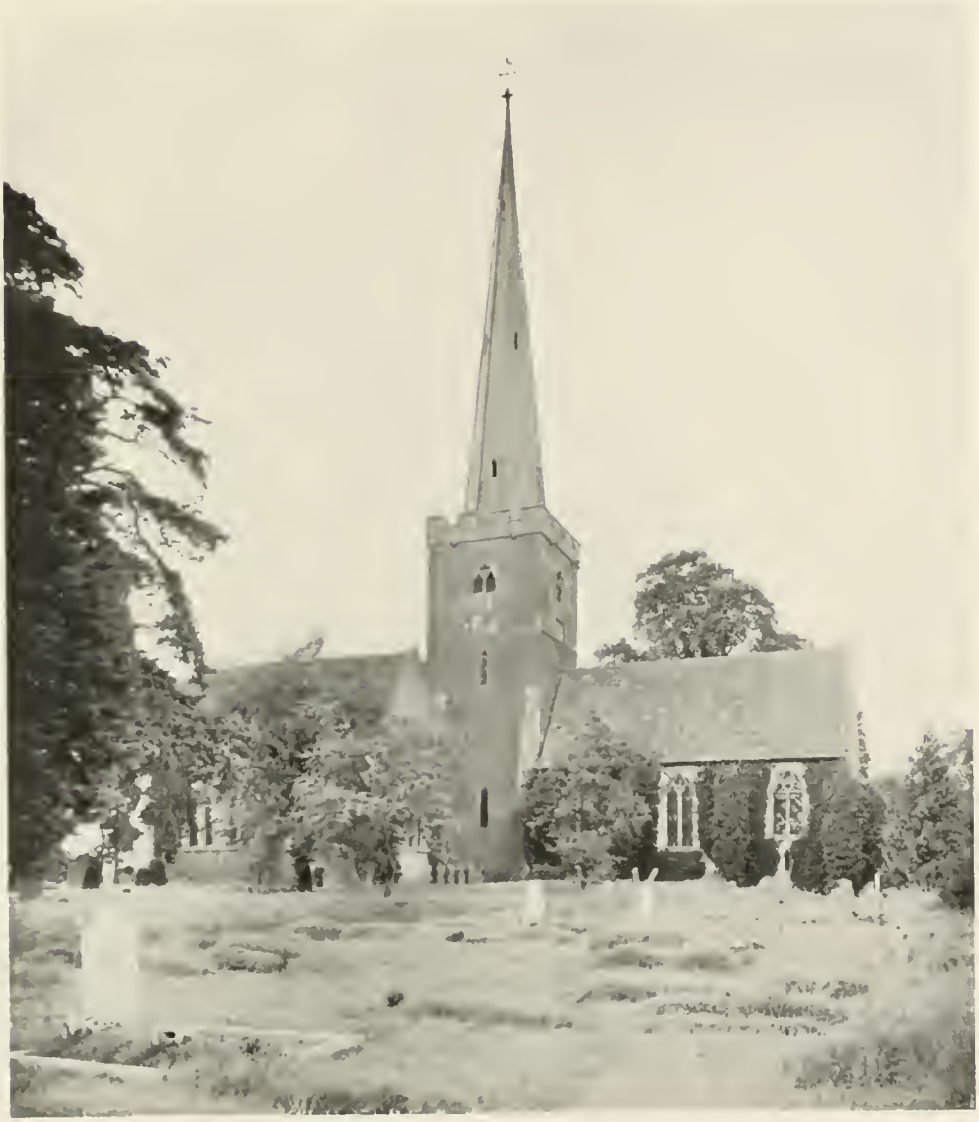

PLATE THIRTY-TWO

BREDON CHURCH, WORCESTERSHIRE

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